

The Holy Angels



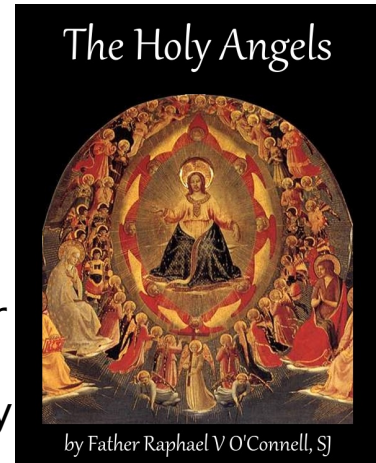
by Father Raphael V O'Connell, SJ

Preface

One might safely say that there are comparatively few who are well informed in what relates to the holy angels.

Probably the knowledge of the great majority of Christians on this subject does not extend beyond the most elementary truths. It is, however, a regrettable fact for more than one reason. For, in the first place, what God has revealed to us in Holy Writ is all meant for our spiritual

advantage, and that advantage will surely be greater in proportion as we ponder over the inspired text more seriously and more lovingly, and thus dispose our hearts better for the fruit that is intended to be gathered.



Then, while it may appear that very little has been made known to us concerning those blessed spirits, we must bear in mind that in Holy Scripture a few words often contain an ample fund of truth, and frequently open up a rich vein, which, if it is pursued with diligence and perseverance, will put us in possession of a most precious treasure.

Thus it is that the great Doctors of the Church, and the learned commentators on Holy Scripture are able to expand to such length the inspired utterances of the sacred writers, and to enlarge so much the scope of our knowledge of divine things. To be sure, their conclusions in many instances are not certain with the certainty of faith, but that is no valid objection to them on our part, when we have so often to content ourselves, in the realm of the merely natural sciences, with much that is at best but conjecture and hypothesis.

The subjects which Catholic theology deal with are so sublime that even an incomplete knowledge of them is to be highly esteemed and considered preferable to a much fuller acquaintance with the physical sciences. These latter may serve us for the improvement of our temporal life, but the former is the science of the saints, and should stimulate us to an earnest effort to deserve by daily meditation that supernatural light and guidance which alone can enable us to penetrate within the veil.

Meanwhile it is a great thing for us that we are able to discern even dimly the mysteries of that inner world which is all about us, but of which few have perception. It is much that we can at least stand on the threshold of that mighty temple wherein God shows Himself to the elect in unclouded majesty, and that our eyes, if they may not now behold Him as He is, may yet catch some faint glimpse of "the glory to come that (one day) be revealed to us."

The following pages are intended to present to the reader, in a systematic way, some clear notions about the angels and their hierarchies. The writer, while aiming at a certain measure of completeness in the handling of his subject, has sought at the same time to avoid any lengthy discussion of questions that might appear too abstruse. One omission, however, which is not justified on that particular ground, may be noted - it is the omission of a separate and detailed treatment of the reprobate angels, and especially of the nature of their punishment and the activities which they are permitted to exercise in this upper world, whether for the chastisement of sinners, or for the trial for the just. Suffice it to say that anything more than a brief and passing reference did not come within the writer's present purpose, which is mainly the promotion of devotion to the holy angels. If it should seem advisable, however, some chapters dealing expressly with the evil spirits might be added to a future

edition of the book. Meanwhile, it only remains for the writer to give expression to the hope that the following pages may awaken in the reader a greater interest in the angels, and may help to beget in him an habitual consciousness of their presence, a certain holy familiarity with them, and a loving confidence in their protection.

An Invisible World

Upon the thickly-people
earth,

In ever ceaseless flow,
Full thrice ten thousand
deathless beings

Pass lightly to and fro.
Keepers of mortal men
unseen,

In airy vesture dight,
Their good and evil deeds they scan,
Stern champions of the right.

- Hesiod, *Works and Days*, (V. 252 ff.)



It is somewhat startling to meet with a passage like the above in an old pagan author. It comes so near to expressing the consoling Catholic doctrine on holy guardian angels, that we have good reason to be surprised as we read it. Is it, perhaps, a relic of primitive tradition? It would certainly not be rash to think so. On the other hand, it was so common a thing among the ancient heathen to people all nature with deities of their own invention that we may have here only a particular manifestation of that tendency.

There are people who have felt aggrieved that the dazzling light of Christianity came to dispel the pleasing illusions of paganism, as if the truth were not preferable to error, and far grander too, and more beautiful, even where it offers less material for the imagination to feed upon! For after all, the imagination is an inferior faculty, and the delights of which it is the source are on a far lower plane than the pleasures of intellect; especially, they cannot compare with the pure joys of the mind that is guided and uplifted by faith.

To know the one true God with that clearness and that certainty which have come with the Christian religion; to have been taught the great mysteries of the Holy Trinity and the incarnation of the Son of God is a sublime heritage, and he who has been deemed worthy of it has that within him which is meant to unfold itself little by little until heaven itself opens out into the full and beatifying vision of God.

Meanwhile, besides our certain knowledge of the existence of God, of His infinite perfection, and of His boundless love for us, we have also the assurance of the presence in the world about us of a multitude of glorious beings, friendly to us, deeply solicitous in our behalf; our elder brethren, in fact, charged by our common Father to watch over us and to lead us safely through a host of danger to our happy home in heaven.

It may not be surprising that we pay too little heed to these our zealous guardians - for we find it hard to emancipate ourselves from the thralldom of the sensible world, and correspondingly hard to lift ourselves to higher things - but it surely means some loss to us that we are not more mindful of them, more trustful towards them, and more filled with a sense of grateful appreciation of the loving kindness of our heavenly Father in making such merciful provision for our frailty.

We shall do well, then, to rouse ourselves and to strive to acquire the habit of appealing to them in our needs, and we may be quite sure that the results will more than repay us for whatever our fidelity in this respect may cost us.

Existence of the Angels

The mere light of reason does not assure us of the truth that there exists a whole world of invisible beings far more perfect than ourselves, and deputed by God to watch over us and shield us from harm. There are indeed certain facts, apart from revelation, ladder stretching from earth to heaven, whereon were angels ascending and descending. Earlier still an angel stayed the hand of Abraham as he was about to plunge the knife into the breast of his beloved son, and promised him in the name of God to multiply his seed as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is by the seashore, and to bless in him all the nations of the earth.



Again, an angel comforted Agar in her sore distress and pointed out to her a well where she could find water for her dying boy. An angel led the people of Israel into the lands of the heathen nations which God gave them after their departure out of Egypt. And later under King Ezechias an angel of the Lord slew in a single night a hundred and eighty-five thousand of the army of Sennacherib, the Assyrian King, who boastfully threatened to capture Jerusalem, and carry off its people into slavery. (4 Kings 16)

Mention of the holy angels occurs frequently, too, in the Psalms and in the prophecies. For instance, an angel of the Lord bade Habacuc in Judea, bear to Daniel in the lions' den at Babylon, the food he had prepared for the reapers, and catching him up by the hair of his head, transported him in

an instant from the one place to the other, and set him down beside the lions' den. (Daniel 16:33)

Hence it is clear that in the Old Testament alone, we have ample Scriptural warrant for our belief in the angels, and the New Testament is quite as explicit. Our Divine Lord himself alludes to Jacob's vision when He speaks of angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. He also represents to us the angels of the little ones who believe in Him as ever beholding the face of His Father who is in heaven, giving us in these words the surest basis for what the Church teaches us with respect to our guardian angels.

The Angel Gabriel, who four centuries previously had appeared to the Prophet Daniel, declaring to him the time of the coming of the Messias, appears also in the blessed fullness of time, first of Zachary, to tell of the birth of the Precursor, and then to our ever blessed Lady, to announce the advent of the Redeemer himself. And when our Lord was born in the stable at Bethlehem, a whole host of angels celebrated the event with glad acclaim, rejoicing that at length the divine promise to our race was fulfilled.

There is no doubt then of the existence of the holy angels, and it remains for us to consider their nature and their gifts, that we may be filled with admiration for them and that our hearts may expand with holy joy at the thought that one day we shall see them as they are - those glorious beings, those countless throngs - and be united with them in the bonds of close and everlasting intimacy.

What the Angels Are

When we say that the angels are pure spirits, we know, of course, what we mean to assert, but we do not always grasp (perhaps it would be more correct to say, we do not always fully realize) what the expression implies. Our knowledge is all received through the senses, and what we know positively, and without the help of negations, is some material, sensible object, having sensible qualities such as size, shape and colour; or it is some abstract notion of the mind, such as being, substance, cause and the like, which does not of itself either imply or exclude the limitations of matter.

To know anything that is positively immaterial and not a mere abstraction, we must have recourse to negation. The word *immaterial* itself is evidence of this. We must make use of such elements of thought as our experience supplies, and *deny*, at the same time, certain imperfections which are inherent in all material things. Thus a pure spirit is one that has no body, that was never intended for union with the body, that has no aptitude for such union - that is, such union as would make of the two, one compound substance.

We try to make more clear our description of a pure spirit by noting that it is a substance which is not matter, which does



not, in its operations, depend upon matter and which, furthermore, in its qualities and attributes is superior to material substances.

When we assert that a spirit is not matter, that is not enough to lift it up above the order of material things. Material things have a substantial form that is not of itself, matter; still less it is the vital principle of plants and animals in itself, matter. But these substantial forms are undoubtedly material in the sense that they are dependent upon matter for all their operations.

When we speak of spirit, or spiritual substance, we mean something that in itself is not matter; and also (at least in its higher operations) is independent of matter. That is to say, it is independent of any material organ as co-principle of its acts. And if there is question of a pure spirit, the latter has no operations in which a bodily organ has or can have part.

It is, then, in this particular sense that we use the word *pure* when we speak of the angels as pure spirits. There is no question here of moral purity. The human soul is not a pure spirit, but is by nature, wedded to the body; and yet the human soul may be endowed with the most perfect moral purity, as is the case, for instance, with our Immaculate Mother, or with the souls of the saints in general. On the contrary, the demons are pure spirits in the sense in which we are using the term now, and yet we all know how hideous they are from the moral point of view.

In our next chapter we shall consider Catholic teaching concerning the nature of angels, in relation to the sources of religious truth and especially with respect to the attitude of the Fathers of the Church.

Views of Some Fathers

The foregoing doctrine in answer to the question "What are angels?" is not strictly a matter of faith. It has not been defined. Yet it is certain, and a contrary opinion would surely be rash, in view of the unanimity of Catholic theologians and the plain teaching of the Lateran Council. Nevertheless, certain Fathers of the Church have held a different view, or have at least expressed themselves ambiguously, or have hesitated to pronounce an opinion on the subject.



The hesitancy of some, or even the positive divergence of opinion on their part would not, of course, be conclusive against the spirituality of the angels. To offset their authority we have that of others who are quite explicit in denying that the angels have bodies; as Saint John Damascene, who affirms that the angels are intelligent substances without matter or body. The most then that can be deduced from the Fathers is that the question is one that must be decided by other arguments.

It may be said, however, that at least some of those who dissent from what is now the accepted teaching of the Church, are in all likelihood not employing terms in the usual sense, or are speaking metaphorically. Thus, when they speak of the angels as *corporeal*, the word has, not its obvious meaning, but signifies "limited in point of space," or

"lacking absolute simplicity." And when they apply the terms fire, ether, and the like, it is only to express in a graphic way certain attributes of the angels to which the qualities of these material substances bear a special resemblance.

Or again, it may be that some who seem to disagree with the view now universally held in the Church, are to be understood not as ascribing to the angels a body as part of their nature, but as referring to a body momentarily assumed, or, in the case of the wicked angels, permanently assigned to them as an instrument of suffering.

But however we may explain the opinions of certain of the Fathers, there is no doubt that in Holy Scripture the angels are often called spirits without any qualifying word; nor is there anywhere question of the souls of angels. Yet had they a body (whether like ours or of a more subtle, ethereal kind) combined in unity of nature with a spiritual substance, the latter would be the soul or vital principle of the compound, and we should expect to find it spoken of as such. If this is not the case, and if on the contrary the human soul is never described by the word *spirit* without further qualification, the inference seems obvious that the angels are pure spirits - that is, spirits not naturally capable of union with a body.

The Council of Lateran, to which we have already referred, has this plain testimony, where it defines that God,

by His almighty power brought both creations out of nothing, that of spirit, and that of bodies; that is to say, that of angels and that of the world, and then that of man, as akin to both, being composed of spirit and of body.

Here the antithesis between body and spirit excludes the idea of the angels having like man a composite nature. He is

made up of body and soul, but they are pure spirits. No wonder that with so clear a pronouncement to guide them, Catholic theologians are unanimous in maintaining the spirituality of the angels.

Angelic Apparitions - How the Angels Appeared - Old Testament

It is noteworthy that the earliest mention of the good angels in Holy Scripture is one in which they appear as instruments of God's vengeance, and not as discharging in our regard their usual offices of beneficence. No doubt they are our friends, most solicitous of our eternal welfare, and eager to see us



settles as co-heirs with them of the kingdom of Heaven; but their first allegiance is to God, and if we prove false to Him, they will rise up at the last day as our accusers and separating us from the legions of the just, will assign us our place with the apostate angels and the other reprobates.

When our first parents transgressed the commandment of God, He cast them forth from the Garden of Eden, and set cherubim with flaming swords at its portals to guard every approach to the tree of life (Genesis 3:24) lest they should eat of it and live forever. It is not said in what form the angels appeared, or whether they were seen at all by Adam and Eve, although the mention of swords would seem to imply a visible presence and a visible threat. Certainly so unequivocal a menace, showing to the banished pair the utter hopelessness of their lot, must have precluded forever any attempt on their part at regaining their former home.

The angels who appeared to Abraham as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day (Genesis 18), were apparently like ordinary travellers, whose feet could be soiled by the dust of the road and who might be thought to stand in need to rest and refreshment in order to pursue their journey to its close. So too when they appeared to Lot as he sat at evening in the gate of the city (Genesis 19), and pressed them to turn in to him and wash their feet and eat and abide with him till morning. Again, it was an angel in human shape who wrestled with Jacob all through the night, before he blessed him and changed his name to Israel.

Of the angels in Jacob's vision, nothing is told as to what they looked like. Only the fact is recorded that he saw them ascending and descending a ladder that stretched from earth to heaven. (Exodus 14:19) Of the angel who went before the camp of the Israelites as they fled from Pharaoh, it is not said whether or not he was seen by the chosen people, though we are told that when he shifted his position to the rear, as the Egyptians advanced against them, the pillar of cloud, which served them as a guide, went back along with him.

In some instances the sacred writer tells us merely that an angel called from heaven; such was the case when Abraham was about to sacrifice his son Isaac; and Agar heard the angel call when her boy Ismael was parched with thirst and ready to die. In other instances we are informed of the effect of the visitation but no apparition is mentioned - as in the case of the angel of death who slew in one night all the first-born of the Egyptians or utterly destroyed the vast army of Sennacherib.

The Prophet Daniel, on the other hand, in narrating the remarkable series of visions that were vouchsafed to him concerning the future of his own people, and of the heathen

nations that surrounded them, and with reference to the coming of Christ, speaks with considerable detail of the terrifying appearance of the angel whom he beheld by the great river Tigris - probably Gabriel, who had appeared to him twice previously.

"And I lifted up my eyes, and I saw: and behold a man clothed in linen, and his loins were girded with the finest gold. And his body was like the chrysolite, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as a burning lamp; and his arms, and all downward even to the feet, like in appearance to glittering brass; and the voice of his word like the voice of a multitude. And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision.... And I heard the voice of his words; and when I heard, I lay in consternation, upon my face, and my face was close to the ground. And behold a hand touched me, and lifted me up upon my knees and upon the joints of my hands. And he said to me: Daniel, thou man of desires, understand the words that I speak to thee, and stand upright...and I stood trembling." (Daniel 10:5-11)

Another truly marvelous event is recounted in the second book of Machabees, in which the actors must surely have been angels. When Heliodorus, by order of King Seleucus undertook to rob the treasury of the Temple of Jerusalem, "there appeared to them," says the sacred writer, "a horse with a terrible rider upon him, adorned with a very rich covering; and he ran fiercely and struck Heliodorus with his forefeet, and he that sat upon him seemed to have armour of gold. Moreover, there appeared two other young men, beautiful and strong, bright and glorious, and in comely apparel, who stood by him on either side and scourged him without ceasing with many stripes. And Heliodorus suddenly fell to the ground, and they took him up covered with great darkness, and having put him into a litter, they carried him out." (2 Machabees 3:25-27)

Perhaps, however, the most pleasing of all the apparitions of angels recorded in Holy Writ, as it is certainly the one of greatest duration and of most familiar intercourse, is that of the Archangel Raphael to Tobias and his son, to whom he appeared as a beautiful young man, all ready for a journey. But of this in detail is a subsequent chapter.

Angelic Apparitions - How the Angels Appeared - New Testament

Only the messages of the angels who foretold the birth of the Redeemer, and of his blessed Precursor, are reported to us by the evangelists, Saint Luke and Saint Matthew. We are not informed as to what they looked like, although we are told that the Angel Gabriel, who appeared to Zachary, stood at the right side of the altar of incense, and that the aged priest was startled and seized with fear on seeing him. Some have thought that the apparition of the same glorious spirit to our blessed Lady was purely intellectual, but the word of the evangelist - "being come in" - would be understood more naturally as implying a visible corporeal presence.



When Our Lord was at length actually born in Bethlehem in Judea, His birth was announced to the shepherds by an angel who suddenly stood by them amid wondrous brightness, and who spoke to them with heavenly condescension, while presently a whole host of angelic spirits mingled their voices with his in the strains of the sweetest hymn that was ever heard by mortal ears.

An angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph in his sleep to warn him to take the Child and His mother and flee into Egypt when

Herod sought the life of the Child, and again in Egypt after the death of Herod to bid him return to the land of Israel. Nothing, however, is said as to the form in which the angel showed himself. Nor are we supplied with any details regarding the apparition of the angels who came to minister to Our Lord after the series of temptations to which He was pleased to submit at the beginning of His public life, or of the privileged spirit whose role it was to comfort Our Lord in His agony in the Garden.

On the other hands, the evangelist, Saint Matthew, present us a striking picture of the angel who first announced to the holy women Our Lord's resurrection from the dead.

"And behold, there was a great earthquake. For an angel of the Lord descended from heave, and coming, rolled back the stone [from the entrance to the tomb], and sat upon it. And his countenance was a lightning, and his raiment as snow. And for fear of him, the guards were struck with terror, and became as dead men." (Matthew 28:2-4)

But to the women who sought Jesus crucified, he was all condescension and sweetness, and bade them have no fear, but go and bear the good tidings to the disciples.

Saint Mark speaks of a young man clad in a white garments and sitting to the right as the women entered the sepulcher; and he addressed them graciously, bearing the joyous message of the resurrection of our divine Saviour. Saint Luke tells of two men who stood by them in shining apparel, and reminded them of Our Lord's own prediction that He was to rise again. And finally, Saint John in narrating the first apparition of Our Lord himself after His resurrection, records how Mary Magdalen, as she stood weeping at the tomb, stooped down and looking in, "saw two against in white,

sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been laid." (John 20:12)

In all these instances the angels appear in human form, but with a glory of vesture and of aspect which was quite in keeping with the splendid miracle of the resurrection, and which clearly revealed them as something more than mere human beings.

The Acts of the Apostles

In the *Acts of the Apostles*, mention is several times made of apparitions of angels. First, there are the two, clad in white robes, who reproved the disciples when the latter, after our Lord's ascension from the Mount of Olives, stood gazing up to heaven, instead of setting at once about the work which He had appointed for them to do. (Acts 1:10)

Later, an angel appears to Cornelius, the centurion, and bids him summon Peter to preach the gospel to his household. (Acts 10) So an angel bids Philip hasten to instruct the eunuch of Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians, as he is on his way homeward from Jerusalem. (Acts 8:26) Again an angel appeared to Paul on his voyage to Rome, and in the midst of a prolonged and violent storm, promised him the safety of all who had sailed with him on the ship, though the ship itself was doomed to perish. (Acts 27)

Lastly, there is the still more wonderful apparition of the angel who awakened Peter as he lay asleep in prison between two guards, and, shedding about him a heavenly radiance, struck the shackles from Peter's hands, bade him arise and dress, and to follow him forth into the city, leaving him only when he was, at length, safe from all danger of pursuit. (Acts 12)

The Apocalypse

It would take long to enumerate the many visions of angels recounted by Saint John in his *Apocalypse*. At one time he sees thousands upon thousands standing round about the throne or falling on their faces before it, adoring God and singing the praises of the Lamb. At another, he beholds "four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth...and another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the sign of the living God." (Apocalypse 7:1-2)

Again, Saint John sees "seven angels standing in the presence of God; and there were given to them seven trumpets. And another angel came and stood before the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given to him much incense, that he should offer up the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar, which is before the throne of God. And the smoke of the incense of the prayers of the saints ascended up before God from the hand of the angel." (Apocalypse 8:2-4)

More glorious still, and at the same time awe-inspiring, is the picture the apostle gives us of a "might angel" whom he saw "come down from heaven, clothes with a cloud, and a rainbow was on his head, and his face was as the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire. And he had in his hand a little book open; and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left upon the earth.... And the angel...lifted up his hand to heaven. And he swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things which are therein; and the earth, and the things which are in it; and the sea, and the things which are therein: That time shall be no more." (Apocalypse 10:1-6)

It is in the Apocalypse that we find the account of the

primeval conflict between the Prince of Darkness and the Angel of Light. "And there was a great battle in heaven, Michael and his angels fought with the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels; and they prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven."
(Apocalypse 12:7-8)

The splendour and the majesty of the blessed spirits may be inferred from the impression produced by the sight of one of them upon the mind of the Beloved Disciple, favoured though he had been by so many wondrous visions. "And I, John," he tells us in the last chapter of his great prophecy, "who have heard and seen these things. And after I had heard and seen, I fell down to adore before the feet of the angel, who showed me these things. And he said to me: See thou do it not, for I am thy fellow servant....Adore God."
(Apocalypse 22:8-9)

Angelic Attributes

As spiritual beings, the angels are all endowed with understanding and free will. As pure spirits, there can be no question of their being subject to infirmities or to death. They are by nature immortal, nor have they, like the fabled consort of Aurora, reason to lament the fact. For with them there is no such thing as the decrepitude of age; they retain at all times an unvarying, ever vigorous youth. And so they are represented not only in works of human art, but also in the authoritative pictures drawn for us by the hand of God.



Their beauty we can but very imperfectly conceive. It is of the spiritual order, and does not fall within the range of the senses or imagination. We have, it is true, an idea of spiritual beauty, such as that of virtue, but it does not help us materially, when there is a question of painting for ourselves in their own colours such elusive objects as spiritual substances.

We understand that the angels, being of a higher order than ourselves, and more closely fashioned after the pattern of all beauty and perfection, which is God, must necessarily be of a beauty far surpassing that of our human kind. And so while we know that the angels are not men like us, we attribute to them in our representations of them all those elements which go to make up the most perfect human form - refinement of features, grace of outline, health and vigour of limb, together with perpetual youth. We associate with

them the notion of light and brightness, and accredit to them with other qualities which remove them as far as may be from the grossness and sluggishness of matter. We assign to them the properties of subtlety and wondrous agility, so that no material substance can present an obstacle to them, and they can transport themselves to the ends of the world with more than the rapidity of light.

What an awakening it will be for us when, as the eyes of our body close in death, the eyes of our soul open for the first time to see our guardian angel as he is, without the aid of images drawn from these lower things, and to behold with him a countless array of glorious spirits, and whom now we cannot so much as speak save in faltering accents!

The Angelic Mind

The angels are often spoken of as Intelligences, as though the word expressed the whole of what they are, and they were nothing else but minds. Of course, the implication would not be exact. The angels are highly intelligent beings, but intelligence is not their substance; it is only one of their faculties. Nevertheless, as compared with us and with our grosser methods of knowing, the angelic mind stands out so wonderfully perfect, so agile, so free in its action, so disengaged from the encumbrances of matter, so independent, so quickly hurrying on from principles to their remotest deductions - or rather, beholding the deductions in the principles from which they flow and taking in at a glance where we can barely after much labour arrive at some uncertain conclusions - that the whole force of an angel's nature seems to us to be concentrated in its intellectual power.



We cannot pay a higher tribute to human intelligence than to speak of it as angelic. To say that a philosopher or divine has the mind of an angel is to exhaust the vocabulary of praise, and to call Saint Thomas Aquinas "the angelic Doctor" is not merely to ascribe to him a purity of life whereby he closely resembled the blessed spirits, but chiefly to proclaim him a man of exceptional intellect, and possession a marvelous grasp of divine things.

Those bright intelligences, the holy angels, see God face to face, and that "intuitive vision," as it is called, is the source

of all their blessedness. The Divine Essence is a wondrous mirror in which, while they gaze enraptured on the infinite and soul-enthraling beauties of the Godhead, they see reflect at the same time the whole world of creatures, not vaguely, but as they are, and as it pleases God to manifest them.

That is the clearest and the most perfect knowledge which the angels have - *scientia matutina*, *morning knowledge*, divines have named it - in contrast with *scientia vespertina* or *evening knowledge*, the less perfect knowledge which the angels have through the play of their natural faculties - the latter being in comparison with the former, a mere twilight as compared with the effulgence of the sun at noonday.

Our minds must first be equipped with an image of the object before they can perceive it - the image itself not being the object, but the instrument of knowledge. So, too, with the angelic mind, though with this difference, that while the object determines the images in the case of the human faculty, in the angelic intellect, the image is present from the outset, but inactive until it is determined in some suitable way by the all-piercing divine activity. For while the human mind is closely allied with the sense and on that account may receive its determination indirectly from material objects (though even here the process is not without mystery), in the case of the angels, whose being is purely spiritual, such determination is quite inconceivable.

The images, then, by which the angelic mind is fully equipped for the act of perception, are present in the faculty as its modifications from the beginning, but are not necessarily operative. Their concurrence in the act of knowing is dependent partly on the free will of the angels, partly on circumstances affecting the object. There is no good reason for thinking that the angels have forever

present to their minds everything that falls within the range of their knowledge, nor do they represent to themselves an object as existent, until it actually exists.

There is another great difference between the images which complete the intellectual faculty of the angels and dispose it for the act of natural knowledge, and those whereby the human mind is rendered similarly apt. The angels approach much nearer than we to the simplicity and spirituality of the divine being, and hence as God knows all things and comprehends all things through His own essence, as through a perfect, all-embracing mirror, so the angelic mind is endowed with images - *species* the schoolmen call them - of far greater range than our, and ever broader in their scope and more universal, as angel rises above angel in glory, and draws nearer and nearer to the source of all being, and the fountain-head from which all knowledge flows. The universal ideas of the blessed spirits are not, like ours, mere shadowy outlines of their objects, more and more bereft of content as they become more and more universal, but on the contrary, the more universal ideas are richer in content, and belong in consequence to the loftier intelligences.

Note - universal ideas in the strict sense are those which represent indifferently any one of a multitude of individuals. Through the abstractive power of the mind, the object represented has been stripped of its individuating characteristics, and thus the mental image may serve equally well as a representation of any similar object.

But the universal ideas of the angels are of a totally different kind. They are universal not through lack, but through abundance of content. Such a universal idea would be, for instance, the concept of this or that earthly kingdom, of which some particular angel might be the appointed guardian. Not only would the angel have full knowledge of

the kingdom as a whole, but every detail affecting its physical characteristics as well as its people would be clearly manifest to him.

The nearer the angels approach the unspeakable perfection of their Maker, whose divine essence is like a boundless mirror reflecting at once all existing as well as all possible being, the more they recede from a multiplicity of ideas, and the more they resemble Him in the unity and simplicity of their knowledge.

The Angelic Will

In a spiritual nature, spiritual perception is followed by a corresponding inclination of attraction or aversion which we call *will*, though the name is more usually applied to the faculty than to the act. Its object is that which is perceived as *good*, i.e., as befitting the subject, or in some way or other perfecting it. If the object is apprehended only in that general way, the faculty cannot be indifferent - it can only seek, it cannot turn away from its object. So, too, were the object apprehended as under every aspect good, and the fullness of good, the will could only turn toward it and covet it with all the eagerness and all the energy of its nature. But where the object is presented to the will by the intellect as partly good and partly evil, or at least defective, or where the highest good itself is not perceived in all its loveliness and infinite attractiveness, the will is free either to embrace or to reject the object - even to abstain from any activity respecting it.



That the angels were endowed with freedom of will at their creation follows from the spirituality of their nature, and from the fact too that we are free. For although the power to choose moral evil is a defect, yet to be master of one's acts is a perfection, and the angelic nature is more perfect than ours.

But the angelic will labours under the defect of every finite

will. It is of its own nature capable of sin, and a great multitude of the angels did actually sin, and on that account were cast forever into the abyss of hell.

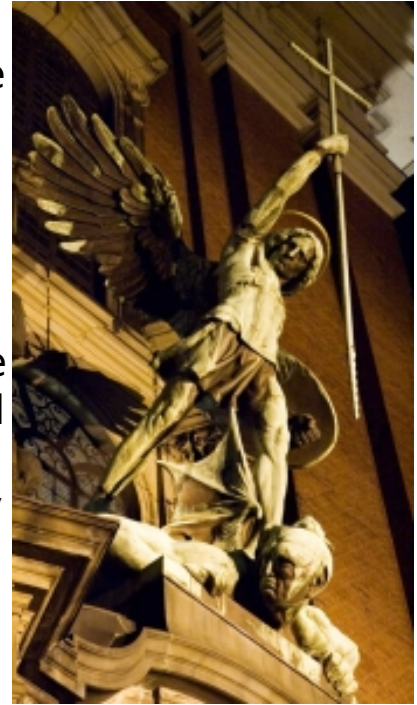
Some have thought that the angels, having once made their choice, must remain immovably fixed in it, and in this way they explain how it was impossible for the demons to repent of their sin and so obtain forgiveness. These angels were free before their choice, they say, but not after it.

It may, of course, be conceded that with their extraordinary clearness of perception the angels lack an element which is largely responsible for much fickleness on our part. Nevertheless, it does not appear why a clearness of vision which left them free antecedently to the act of choice should prove an obstacle to their freedom after it.

Besides, there is a pretty general consent among the Fathers that the reason why the angels, having once chosen, continued ever after unalterably fixed in their choice was not their nature but, in the cast of the reprobate angels, God's justice, and in the case of the blessed spirits, the grace of God or the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Trial of the Angels

The angels being by nature free and masters of their acts, and hence capable of meriting the state of everlasting blessedness, it did not please God to admit them to His kingdom except as the price and recompense of their fidelity in His service. They were elevated to the supernatural state at the moment of their creation, being adorned with sanctifying grace and destined to see God face to face in heaven, but they must first prove themselves worthy, by standing the test to which their loyalty was subjected. They were en route for heaven; they had not as yet reached their glorious destination: they were *viatores*, not *comprehensores*.



What the test was which they were obliged to undergo has not been made known to us. They walked by faith during the period of their probation, and not by sight or intuition. By faith they knew God, and the Blessed Trinity, and Him who was to be the Head of all creation, that is, *Christ*; but whether the mystery of the Incarnation was distinctly revealed to them we cannot say. And yet it does seem likely that for the rebel angels, their sin, as many theologians hold, was a refusal to bow down in adoration before the human nature of the Son of God.

We are safe, at least, in saying that it was a sin of pride. They were enamoured of their own surpassing loveliness,

their marvelous strength, the amazing breadth and depth of their mental vision and their other splendid attributes, and they did not stop to refer them all to the liberality and munificence of their Creator, but foolishly gloried in them, as though they were in the fullest sense their own; and thus, by these idle thoughts and this empty self-complacency, they lost the solid fruit of being forever established in the love and friendship of their Maker.

The sight of God's own Son, revealed to them from afar as a tender Babe, swathed in poverty and lowliness, and fed at the breast by an earthly Mother, was a revolving spectacle to these proud spirits, and when the command was intimated to them, "Let all the angels of God adore him" (Hebrews 1:6), they held back in sullen contumacy, and being hurled from heaven for their sin, sank forever into the abyss of hell.

How long they had basked in the light of God's love and in the magnificence of their own glorious gifts - how long, if measured in units of our time - it is useless to speculate. What may be said with sufficient assurance is that their reprobation followed upon their first deliberate act, just as the good angels reaped in the ecstatic joy of the beatific vision the immediate recompense of their first full and deliberate consecration of themselves to the worship of their Maker.

The Speech of Angels

Saint Paul, writing to the Corinthians, say, "If I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." (1 Corinthians 13:1) The angels, then, no less than men, have their tongues, their speech, whereby they communicate to one another their thoughts and aims. And how else indeed could that mighty society of which they are the members be held together in the perfect harmony which belongs to all things heavenly without this necessary social bond?



Besides, we are expressly told in Holy Writ that the seraphim whom Isaias beheld standing in the presence of the Lord cried one to another, "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of hosts; all the earth is full of his glory." (Isaias 6:3) And Saint John, in the book of the Apocalypse, tells us how the angel whom he saw ascending from the rising of the sun called out with a loud voice to the four angels who stood on the four corners of the earth, bidding them delay for a while the vengeance which they were commissioned to wreak.

If men converse freely with one another, and if they find in that intercourse with their fellows so keen and subtle a pleasure, a source of such habitual and manifold enjoyment, it surely is inconceivable that the blessed spirits should be condemned by nature to a state of isolation, the more repugnant because of the sublime content of their minds

and the burning mutual love with which they are enkindled.

But when we come to explain the manner of their speech, we find ourselves at a loss. They are pure spirits, and their language must be wholly spiritual. They may, when they appear to men, make use of human speech. They may sing in melodious accents when they announce to simple shepherds the birth of the Saviour of mankind. They may chant in strains of more than earthly music at the tomb of the Virgin Mother. They may translate their thoughts into human language when they would convey them to those who hear with ears of flesh, and who express their thoughts by the use of throat, tongue, lips and airy voice.

But when angels speak one to another, when they converse among themselves of the majesty of the Creator and of the splendour of the works of His hands, or intimate His will to such as are subject to them in the scheme of the celestial hierarchy, what is the character of their speech? What is the method of communication between them?

It ought to be such as to allow of their communicating with each other at great distances. For men also do this, to some extent with the unaided voice, and to a far greater degree with the aid of mechanical appliances.

An angel, too, when speaking should be able to address himself at choice to one or to several. He should be able to confide a secret to this one or that, or to speak openly so that all who will may hear. He should be able also to know who speaks to him, and with just what earnestness or energy, he would convey his thoughts and sentiments.

In fine, we must concede that an angel's speech is such as to admit of the possibility of lying - not, of course, in angels confirmed in grace, but considering only their natural

faculty - for the devil is the "father of lies."

To safeguard these requirements, some theologians think it explanation enough to say that the angel who speaks must freely direct his thoughts to this or that angel, or, if he choose, to a number of angels, and that by the very fact - not, of course, without the ordinary divine concurrence - that corresponding concepts are awakened in the minds of those whom he is addressing.

Others hold that an angel who would speak to another must act upon the latter according to the spiritual nature of both, and must produce in his intellect an image of himself - to indicate the speaker - and at the same time an image corresponding to the thought to be communicated.

The question is a difficult one, and for the full and satisfactory solution we must be content to wait until the happy hour when we ourselves shall be introduced into the glorious company of the blessed spirits, and shall know from experience how wondrous God is in that supreme order of beings, which, if we except the Sacred Humanity of Christ, and our Blessed Lady, is the crowning work of His creative hand.

Presence in Space - Activity

I

It is sometimes said familiarly that a thousand angels might dance on the point of a needle. That they would assemble there would seem to be a corollary from the simplicity of their nature which excludes extension. That they could dance there is another matter, and may be passed over as a bit of pleasantry.

But angels do not fill space as bodies do. A body cannot naturally exist without occupying space, and is commensurate to the space thus occupied, equal parts of the body filling equal parts of space, and each part of the space corresponding to a definite part of the body.

But angels have no parts. Hence if they occupy a given portion of space, they must be whole and entire throughout its extent, and in every assignable part of it, even as the human soul, which is also simple, is whole and entire in the whole body, and in every portion of it.

We can hardly conceive of a thing existing and yet not being anywhere. Nevertheless, there have been philosophers and divines - among them the prince of theologians, Saint Thomas Aquinas - who have held that, under certain



conditions, there is no impropriety in saying that an angel would be nowhere, that is, not in any place. This is in keeping with their contention that it is the activity of an angel within a given place which alone warrants us in saying that he is in that place, although he may be present there in his substance independently of such action.

II

It is not to be supposed that an angel's sphere of activity is of indefinite extent. The angels are creatures, and as such are limited in their being and operation. Their range of action as well as the energy with which they are capable of acting will vary with the perfection of their nature. The higher angels enjoy a broader, the lower a more restricted sphere of operation, which even the least among them are endowed with a force and energy far beyond anything of which the material world offers us an example.

Whether the faculty whereby angels act in the outer world is distinct from their will is disputed by theologians, but it may be assumed that it is not, there being nothing to gain from asserting the contrary. How angels act on foreign substances, whether spiritual or material, is decidedly not clear. That they do act, however, we know from the various ministries in which they have been employed according to the testimony of Holy Writ, as when the angel stirred the water in the pool at Bethesda, or smote the chains of Peter as he lay asleep in prison, and caused them to fall from his limbs. We know it also from analogy with the human soul, which moves the body to which it is united, and through it, acts upon others exterior to it. To be sure, the analogy is not perfect, but on the other hand, the angels, as a part of the universe, must exert an influence upon the world at large and as its noblest portion, cannot lack a power which belongs to inferior beings.

Yet all that the angels can effect in the material world is reducible to motion. They can transfer this or that physical agent, with incredible celerity, from place to place, and knowing thoroughly the varied forces of nature, and their mutual action and reaction upon one another, they are able to apply them with consummate skill for the bringing about of marvelous results.

Thus, if it fell within the order of divine Providence to permit it, they might promptly cure the most obstinate diseases by the application of the proper specifics, which, if necessary, they might bring in a moment from the ends of the earth. But for whatever effects they produce in the physical order they are entirely dependent of physical forces. They cannot dispense with them, and so neither can they accomplish any result instantaneously. The forces of nature act only in time, and their action is measured by time. Angels cannot of themselves work miracles, whatever they do as instruments of the Divine Omnipotence.

Nor can they act directly upon the human soul, but only through the body. They cannot, as it would seem, suggest this or that thought to the mind, impart this or that impulse to the will, except by acting upon the imagination, and even this they can do only through the body or the outer senses.

The Flight of Angels

The angels have each a limited sphere of action. They cannot accomplish anything beyond it. They cannot act directly at a distance, but to produce an effect where they are not actually present, they must transfer themselves from place to place. This they do with incredible speed.



We do not share the opinion of those who hold that angels pass from one place to another instantaneously, that is to say, without passing through the intermediate space. That would be a sort of replication, which is perhaps the more common and more likely way of explaining how Our Lord's blessed body in heaven becomes present on the altar through the words of consecration, but seems an unlikely, as it is an unnecessary, explanation of what must be an ordinary occurrence in the life of an angel.

The angels do, indeed, enjoy extraordinary agility. They can traverse bewildering distances with amazing rapidity. But, so can some material things, as the light, which travels at the rate of approximately 200,000 miles second, the equivalent of eight times the circumference of the earth. And yet, as it speeds towards us from the distant stars, the light marks successively every portion of the endless pathway it must cover.

Hence, too, the angels, while they, as spiritual substances in no wise hampered by the limitations of matter, fly through

the boundless realms of space with a speed far exceeding that of light, may with reason be thought to arrive at the term of their motion only after having passed in succession through every inch of the intervening space.

The Angels and Time

Time is one of the most elusive notions. We all understand it well enough for practical purposes, but when there is question of clearly defining its nature, the lay mind, if not that of the philosopher, finds the task a baffling one.

All that is actual in time is the present moment, which we express by word *now*, and which almost ere we have spoken it, has ceased to be. It might be compared with an imaginary plane dividing, at any given point in the onward flow of a stream, the waters that have sped by from those which have to pass. For in the march of time the present is but the limit which separates the past from the future.



Time is the duration of things whose whole being is in a state of succession. It cannot properly be predicated of what in its nature is permanent. And here perhaps we may look for at least a partial explanation of certain words which occur in that striking scene in the Apocalypse, already quoted.

And the angel, whom I saw standing upon the sea and upon the earth, lifted up his hand to heaven. And he swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things which are therein; and the earth, and the things which are in it; and the sea, and the

things which are therein: *That time shall be no longer.*
(Apocalypse 10:5-6)

After the Judgement Day, the status of men, no less than that of the angels, will be fixed forever. Their lot will then be one of uninterrupted, unending bliss, or of ceaseless misery. For them, consequently, time will have given place to eternity.

Now the whole being of the angels is changeless and permanent, and their highest and noblest operations, which have to do with the beatific vision, are equally so. They are in no way subject to the variations of the things in time.

Nevertheless the angels co-exist with our time, and hence their duration may be measured by it, and we may speak of them as having existed for, say, six thousand years or more; whereas, were there no heavenly bodies by whose regular movements the years are computed, it would be impossible for us to assign any measure to their existence.

There is indeed a sense in which time may be predicated of the angels independently of all exterior terms of comparison. The accidental operations of the angelic mind and will, which have created things for their object, admit of succession - in fact, succeed each other, much as ours do. And yet there is this important difference, that while in us there is a gradual transition from the imperfect to the perfect, in the angels the transition is instantaneous from one perfect act to another. Succession involves times and hence, with reference to those secondary acts, the angels are affected by time. But it is not time like ours - an onward, ceaseless, equable flow; rather may it be compared with the abrupt transition from book to book on the shelves of a library. It is *tempus discretum*, not *continuum* - discrete, not

continuous, time.

The Occupations of the Angels

God is a mighty Monarch, and like other monarchs He has His court. His supreme dignity requires that it should far surpass all earthly courts in splendour and magnificence. Hence the multitude of those whose privilege it is to stand before Him is exceedingly vast, and the glory of their gifts and endowments is such as to fit them to be ministers and courtiers of the Kings of kings.



"Thousands of thousands ministered to him," says the Prophet Daniel, "and then thousand times a hundred thousand stood before him" (Daniel 7:10) The latter figure is the equivalent of a thousand millions, but the purpose of the sacred writer in using such language is doubtless to emphasize the vastness of the throngs of the blessed spirits, rather than to give their exact number.

The angels are ever ready to fly to the ends of the world to execute God's orders. They stand before Him, eager to catch the sound of His voice, and at the least expression of His will, they hasten to fulfil it. Nor are they deterred, if what He wills is great and arduous; for they are "mighty in strength," and it is a joy for them to use their gifts in the service of the Lord of hosts.

Bless the Lord, all ye his angels: you that are mighty in strength, and execute his word, hearkening to the voice of his behests. Bless the Lord, all ye his hosts: you ministers of his that do his will. (Psalms 102:20-21)

Of one chief employment of the holy angels - i.e., as guardians to our frail human race - we shall speak at length later on. The fact to which we would call special attention here is, that this occupation in no way interferes with their other all important and most absorbing business - the blissful contemplation of the Divine Essence. For our Lord himself expressly states that "their angels in heaven [those of the children of whom He is speaking] ever see the face of my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 18:10)

It is the sight of God as He is, the contemplation of the Divine Essence unveiled, the *beatific vision*, as it is called, which has made the angels blessed hitherto, and will continue to be to them the one source of supreme and perfect bliss for all eternity. No fear that they will ever weary of it. We only weary of what but imperfectly satisfies our cravings. We can never find true contentment here; not only because along with the little that is gratifying to us, there are so many ills to plague and torture us, and because the little good that we enjoy must be relinquished at death; but also because no one earthly object, and no accumulation of earthly good things, fully meets the yearnings of the human heart. Hence that ceaseless restlessness with which we fly from one vanity to another in the fruitless search after happiness.

There is only one object whose possession stills every craving, because it fill to it utmost capacity the whole mind and being of the creature, fulfilling all its desires, and setting all its longings at rest. Only the vision of God, the infinite good, can thus bring it peace. No wonder if amid

such blissful repose the ages glide by unnoticed, and "a thousand years are as a day that has passed."

Whatever else the angels may be occupied in doing, they never lose sight of God. They bask forever, in the eternal sunshine of His presence. They behold Him face to face in all His glory, they know Him even as they are known to Him, and seeing "are transformed into the same image from glory to glory."

And they also love God, and their love is a consuming flame. They sing unceasingly the song of love. Their will is ever one with God's will, and they are at all times full of melody in His praise.

The Angelic Hierarchy

Order is heaven's first law. The countless multitudes of the angels are not a disorderly mob, but a thoroughly organized society. The battalions of the blessed spirits are a well-marshaled host. There are degrees of glory, and differences of rank. All are not equal, save in this - that all alike are children of God, members of the great family of God, and of the mystical body of Christ.

Just as in the natural body various functions are discharged by various parts diversely located and of dissimilar structure, so in that body which is Christ's, the angels have each their own separate place, with their own particular function to fulfil; and while all are truly great, being all sons of the most High God, and princes of His heavenly kingdom, not all are equally high, not all are equally honoured, but one differs from another, both in the gifts of nature and in those of grace, as star differs from star in glory.

About the constitution of this society which comprises all the legions of the holy angels we know only what we gather from certain passing indications in Holy Writ, echoed to be sure, by the teaching of the Fathers. Thus, there is mention in Scripture of various classes of angels, and with evidence opposition, as when Saint Paul says,



...neither death, nor life, no angels, nor principalities,
nor powers, not things present nor things to come.
(Romans 8:38)

When we infer the existence of distinct orders of blessed spirits, and by the aid of other passages, occurring chiefly in the epistles of the same Apostle, we are able to complete the enumeration of them. In the Epistle to the Colossians we read,

For in him [that is, in Christ] were all things created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominations, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and in him. (Colossians 1:16)

Again, the Apostle writes,

Raising him (Christ) up from the dead, and setting him on his right hand in the heavenly places, above all principality, and power, and virtue, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. (Ephesians 1:20-21)

The word *archangels*, too, is found both in Saint Paul and in Saint Jude, and implies a certain superiority and hence distinction. Lastly, we meet the name *seraphim* in Isaiah 6, while *cherubim* is of frequent occurrence, being found first at the end of the third chapter of Genesis, and then often in the other historical books, in the Psalms, and in the prophet Ezechiel.

Hence the mere division of the angels into various orders or classes, without definition as to number, inter-dependence, and the like, is a teaching of our faith, being clearly contained in Holy Scripture. It is also a doctrine commonly

laid down by theologians, following in the footsteps of Saint Denis (or Dionysius) the Aeropagite (or whoever may be the author of that ancient and famous work on the *Celestial Hierarchy*, that the holy angels are divided into three sacred realms, called hierarchies, according to their proximity to God and the fullness of the light flowing in upon their minds from that never-failing, infinite source. This is now the commonly received opinion in the Church.

But there is also a further division of the hierarchies into choirs. To the choirs belong the names met with in the writings of Saint Paul and in other passages of Holy Scripture, as just enumerated. They are nine in all, and thus we have three choirs for each hierarchy, a perfectly natural distribution, as in every realm we meet the highest, the lowest, and the middle class.

As a matter of fact, theologians (and the common voice of the Church along with them) assign to each of the angelic hierarchies, three sacred choirs. The method of distributing these throughout the hierarchies is not however quite uniform, but the usual division is that of Saint Denis (Dionysius) or his namesake, the Pseudo-Aeropagite, from whom Saint Gregory scarcely differs. According to the former, the first and noblest hierarchy embraces in descending scale, the seraphim, cherubim, and thrones. The second or intermediate hierarchy is made up in like order of the dominations, virtues, and powers. The third, or lowest hierarchy comprises the principalities, archangels, and angels.

We must not think, however, that the use of these names is so fixed in Holy Scripture, that one is not employed at times instead of another, that is, in a somewhat looser and broader sense. This is particularly true of the generic name, angel, which is used of all the blessed spirits indifferently, and not

merely of the lowest choir, to which it is specially appropriated. Thus we read in Saint Paul, (Hebrews 1) alluding to Psalm 96, "And let all the angels of God adore him"; and immediately after, "Who makes his angels spirits"; in both of which passages there is question evidently of the whole heavenly army. Again, Gabriel is called the Angel Gabriel, though he is thought, not without reason, to have been one of the highest of all the blessed spirits. So Lucifer is apostrophised by the Prophet Ezechiel, "Thou a cherub," and yet he is commonly supposed to have belonged to the choir of seraphim and to have been perhaps the foremost among them. Lastly, Michael is called by Saint Jude the Archangel Michael, though elsewhere he is spoken of as one of the chief princes, and is regarded by many as having been also of the order of seraphim.

Are All the Angels of One Species?

This question might seem to have been answered by what has been said in the preceding chapter. Yet the division of the blessed spirits into angels, archangels and the other classes there enumerated, does not of itself imply diversity of species. For the widest divergences may exist within the limits of the same specific nature, and may serve to differentiate mere varieties or individuals.



Thus all men are specifically alike, and yet what marked differences do we not observe between the various groups of men? If a profound dissimilarity, not merely in outward features but even in mental and moral characteristics, does not prevent the various divisions of mankind from falling under one and the same species, may it not well be that, in the case of the angels too, there is no essential difference between the various orders of blessed spirits, and whatever variety exists is purely accidental, brought due to super-added gifts or endowments, to place, office, rank, and the like?

At all events, the question as to whether or not there are different species of angels is not one that may be settled out of hand. In the first place, it is not easy matter to define just what makes a difference of species, and a test that might be satisfactorily applied in the case of material things, would be useless in that of spiritual beings. Then, too, we have here

no unanimity of opinion on the part of Catholic divines, but on the contrary, we find ourselves confronted with a great divergence of views.

For there is first the extreme position taken by the Thomistic school, which, as a while, maintains that each angel constitutes a species in himself; in other words, no two angels belong to the same species. We shall not stop to discuss the arguments of the Thomists, which, to the lay mind certainly, would hardly appear convincing. We shall only observe that the weight of opinion among the Fathers of the Church appears to be decidedly against them.

And indeed, the splendour of the heavenly court would seem to require that in every grade of those who minister before the Most High, there should be a multitude of equal rank. This would also give abundant scope to that propensity of the rational creature to regard as naturally his friends, those in whom he beholds the exact reflection of his own qualities and gifts. For although divine love binds all the blessed spirits together in ties of the closest union, yet the supernatural order does not destroy the natural, nor does it extinguish those affinities which have their foundation in nature, even as it came from the Creator's hand.

The Scotists hold the opposite view to that of the Thomists, maintaining that the angels are all of one species, and that whatever differences exist between them are in nowise essential. There are classes of angels only as there are classes of saints, and as there are various divisions of an army - the latter comparison being all the more apt because in Holy Writ the term, *host*, or *army*, is often applied to the angelic throngs.

Many of the Fathers are quoted as adhering to this view, but

others favour neither extreme. They prefer to think that among the angels there are different species, each of which comprises vast multitudes of individuals. And this is the opinion commonly adopted by the theologians of the Society of Jesus, and particularly by the learned Father Suarez.

According to this opinion, one might hold that there are three species corresponding to the number of hierarchies, or nine, corresponding to that of the choirs. But Suarez inclines to the view that the number is incomparably greater, and that the nine choirs are but so many subaltern species, each comprising a multitude of subdivisions, and each of these a countless throng of individuals, differing only by their personal characteristics.

The illustrious doctor bases this opinion on the endless variety of species of material things - of minerals, of plants, of animals - which contributes so wonderfully to the beauty of the universe and the glory of the Creator. For surely an equal, or still greater variety of intellectual beings would enhance still more the glory of God, and the splendour of the world which is the work of His hands.

This supposes, to be sure, that such a multiplication of angelic species is possible. Suarez holds that it is, and that the arguments advanced to prove it impossible, which he examines, are in reality inconclusive.

The Nine Choirs

It is not precisely an article of faith that there are just nine choirs of angels, no more, no less, and yet in the face of the great unanimity of the Fathers on this point, it would be rash to think otherwise.



As for the arrangement of the choirs in the different hierarchies, there is indeed a certain discrepancy, but the order in which they have been given in the preceding chapter is that which is followed by Saint Denis (Dionysius) of the Pseudo-Areopagite, the great authority of our subject, as well as by Saint John Damascene, Saint Thomas, and Suarez, if not by the majority of modern theologians. We shall consider them in that order one by one.

Angels

According to this arrangement the first or lowest hierarchy is made up of the angels, the archangels, and the principalities. The *angels* being the least perfect - that is to say, when compared with the higher orders, for in themselves they are far greater and more perfect than anything that we are familiar with - are called by the generic name, which is taken from the function that is common to all the angels, of whom Saint Paul says that "all are ministering spirits." Considered in general, such ministry does not imply any special perfection, and hence the name angel which is

derived from it, while applicable to all, is especially suited to those who have no pre-eminence in their ministry, even as they have none in their natures. These are the angels of the first or lowest choir, from whom, it is thought, our guardian angels are regularly chosen, and who from time to time are sent as messengers to private individuals.

Archangels

The second choir of the first hierarchy is that of the *archangels*. The name implies a certain superiority in the ministerial office, and hence it may be used of all the higher orders, but not of the lowest. As such superiority in the office of ministering is the least pre-eminence that can be attributed to the holy angels when compared with one another, the name *archangel* is reserved in a special manner for the least of the higher orders, that is to say, for the second choir of the lowest hierarchy.

The name does not, as it would seem, imply any authority over the angels of the inferior choir, but only a greater degree of dignity in the ministry which they exercise. For whereas the angels are deputed for the guardianship of private individuals, the archangels have care of personages of exalted rank, such as kings, pontiffs and other rulers; and whereas angels are employed for the bestowal of personal favours on ordinary people, archangels are the agents in the case of benefits affecting the public at large, and in all matters of graver moment.

Principalities

The foremost place in the first hierarchy is assigned by Saint Denis (Dionysius) or his namesake, and the majority of theologians following him, to the choir of the *principalities*. In all that appertains to the salvation of mankind, whether it

be question of persons of rank or of low degree, of individuals or communities, they have authority over the angels and archangels and are the intermediaries through whom the divine will is intimated to them.

It is likely, too, that certain principalities have immediate care of more important states or kingdoms as well as of more influential princes and bishops; and hence when mention is made of "the prince of the Persians," and "the prince of the Greeks," (Daniel 10:20) the word *prince* is to be understood strictly as referring to one of this particular choir of angels, and not to an angel of some one of the higher orders generally.

And if we understand the term in the same way, when we read, "Behold Michael, one of the chief princes" (Daniel 10:13), it would seem to follow that in the battle where "Michael and his angels fought with the dragon," (Apocalypse 12:7) the principalities are chiefly meant, as having played the main part in that momentous conflict. Not that the angels and archangels are excluded from their share in it, but that they fight under the leadership of the principalities and of Michael their chief, whose role is loftier and more necessary than their own.

Powers

We come now to the second hierarchy of the holy angels, and here the first or lowest place is commonly assigned to the *powers*. It is not easy to see just in what their office differs from that of the principalities, but we may say with Saint Denis (Dionysius) or his namesake, that in the spiritual warfare waged by the demons against the human race, the planning and directing of the campaign whereby their designs are frustrated, belongs to the powers, and the execution thereof to the three inferior choirs, each according

to its grade.

Saint Gregory furthermore assigns to the powers a special efficacy in curbing the demons, who are forced to submit to their authority. Nor is their power over the demons indirect, but it is exercised directly by way of command, constraint and, if need be, by confining them in fetters.

Virtues

The Greek name for the virtues, who compose the second choir of the second hierarchy, is the word from which our adjective *dynamic* is derived, and implies force or energy. Who is not familiar with the terrific energy displayed by *dynamite*, or with the uses of the *dynamo*, the name of which are words of the same origin?

Virtue on the other hand, is a word of Latin derivation, and although we most commonly associate it with moral qualities and moral excellence (as when we speak of the virtue of humility, or of a man of tried virtue) yet the word, even in English, sometimes is employed of mere physical qualities. Thus we say that there is a virtue in certain herbs; and so in Latin, doubtless by an abuse of the term, as Cicero observes, the worth or value even of an irrational object, as a horse or tree, is called *virtus*. In Holy Scripture, and particularly in the New Testament, this use is quite common, and the Latin word *virtutes* is rendered in our version by *miracles* or *mighty works*.

The virtues, then, are those blessed spirits whom God commonly employs for the working of signs and miracles, that is, for whatever is outside the regular order of events established by Providence, as often as the government and preservation of the human race may call for some extraordinary effect. It would not be necessary that in such

cases their intervention should be recognized. Men might not be away that anything preternatural has happened, and yet as such circumstances may frequently arise, it need not surprise us that one of the heavenly choirs is specially deputed for this purpose, without preventing the occasional employment of angels of the higher or lower orders, for such extraordinary effects.

Dominations

The *dominations* hold the highest place among the angels of the second hierarchy. They resemble the principalities in this, that as the latter not only hold the highest place in the lowest hierarchy, but enjoy a certain precedence over angels and archangels, with authority to direct them, so the dominations are supreme over all the blessed spirits of the inferior choirs; and without being directly occupied with any functions having for their end the government of the world or of the human race, they exercise a high control over the ministry of the lower angels, directing them in the discharge of their offices, but in a way which it is difficult to explain without seeming to identify their functions with those of the principalities or powers.

One thing we can say of them with certainty: their names reflect the mystery which surrounds their nature and their functions. It implies a loftier order of intelligences than those previously described - a class of beings whose striking characteristic is an extraordinary elevation in the duties that fall to them, and a corresponding freedom from restraint in their discharge.

Thrones

We now come to the most exalted hierarchy. It is made up of angels whose part it is to form the court of the heavenly

King, to stand forever in His presence, and to sing incessantly His praises. They are not occupied with the government of the world, and are not commonly sent as messengers to men. For this reason it is hard for us to say precisely by what they are distinguished one from another, and in what the peculiar excellence and dignity of each consists. We cannot explain these, as in the case of the inferior choirs, by pointing out the part that is assigned to each in the management of human affairs. We can only illustrate them by the relationship in which these mighty spirits stand to God Himself, and as this is something truly sublime, our explanation will necessarily be unsatisfactory and obscure.

There is no doubt that God dwells not only in all the holy angels, but also in all the blessed in heaven, and in all the just on earth, who are His temples through sanctifying grace. For grace effects, as Suarez observes, a sort of substantial union with God, and they into whom He thus enters become, as it were, the seats whereon His Majesty is enthroned.

Nevertheless, the name *thrones* is not unsuited to serve as a distinctive term whereby to designate one of the highest orders of the holy angels. For, in the first place, the word describes these blessed spirits in their immediate relationship to God and through their union with Him, and thus at once exalts them above all the lower choirs whom we name with reference to this or that external ministry.

Again it sufficiently distinguishes them from the second and third choirs of their own hierarchy. For although the cherubim and seraphim are also the abode of Infinite Majesty, and though God is enthroned in them even more perfectly than in the lowest choir, yet the name *thrones*, as expressing an habitual rather than an actual perfection, is

less apt to denote the excellence of the higher natures, than cherubim and seraphim, terms which imply the exercise of that perfection through the acts of knowledge and love. Hence the name *thrones* is appropriated to the inferior choir.

It expresses, then, a certain aptitude and fitness on the part of those glorious spirits to become the dwelling of the Most High, and the seat of His Majesty. It implies a disposition on their part of wondrous purity and detachment, which prepares them to be as thrones, whereon God sits, and whence His Majesty shines forth, whilst He rules and passes judgement on His creatures.

Cherubim

The *cherubim* are mentioned more frequently in Holy Writ than any other of the celestial choirs, with the exception perhaps of the angels, which, after all, is a generic term. The cherubim are, besides, the first of the holy angels to be named in the sacred pages. For, at the end of the third chapter of Genesis we are told that after casting Adam forth from the Garden of Eden, the Lord "placed before the paradise of pleasure cherubim, and a flaming sword, turning every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."

It is true that some commentators think that here the name is used in a broad sense, and that the angels deputed to guard the earthly paradise were of the choir of the principalities, whose place it is to watch over kingdoms or provinces; or of the powers, as having special authority to curb the evil spirits. The reason they are here called cherubim would then be the fullness of knowledge which the name signifies, and which, in an inferior sense, belongs to all the angels. On the other hand, it would be most appropriate that they who had sinned, as our first parents did, through an inordinate desire of knowledge, should be restrained and

deterred by those possessed of true and surpassing knowledge.

This explanation may not satisfy, but to take the name cherubim in a broad sense is still less satisfactory, where it is used by the Prophet Ezechiel, in setting before us the details of his wonderful vision. (Ezechiel 10) If we do so, with some writers, we leave ourselves without certain scriptural warrant for asserting the existence of a distinct choir of cherubim. The name does also occur, it is true, in an earlier passage, in the description of the temple (3 Kings 6). The form under which the cherubim are there described, corresponds substantially with the description given by Ezechiel and so, these writers argue, if the name need not be taken strictly in the latter place, there appears to be no good reason why it should be taken strictly in the former.

It is a familiar image, often met with in the inspired writers, under which God is portrayed as sitting upon the cherubim. It takes us back to the days when the Israelites were still wandering in the wilderness under the guidance of the great law-giver, Moses. In the directions which God gave to him for the construction of the Ark of the Covenant, a chief feature was the propitiatory, or mercy-seat, which was to cover the ark. Over it Moses was commanded to set two cherubim of beaten gold, spreading their wings and looking one toward the other, and at the same time toward the mercy-seat. It was from the midst of the cherubim thus, as it were, protecting the propitiatory, that God promised to speak to Moses and to deliver to him His commands for the children of Israel; and that is why the propitiatory was also called the *oracle*.

In later times it fell to Solomon's lot to build to the Lord a permanent dwelling, the Temple of Jerusalem, and he built it with a munificence worthy of himself and of the high

purpose to which it was dedicated. Instead of a propitiatory such as Moses constructed, two cubits and a half in length, and one cubit and a half in breadth, which merely covered the ark from end to end, Solomon erected in the inner part of the Temple, the House of the Oracle, twenty cubits in length, twenty cubits in breadth, and twenty cubits in height, and overlaid it with the purest gold.

Then he caused two cherubim of heroic size to be made of olive wood and he set them above the oracle, one on either side. As they stood there, with outstretched wings, like sentinels guarding the propitiatory, they measured each ten cubits in height and ten cubits in from the extremity of one wing to the extremity of the other, and were so placed that the inner wings touched one another. And when all was ready, "the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the Lord into its place, into the oracle of the temple, and into the holy of holies, under the wings of the cherubim." (3 Kings 8:6)

What, then, is the meaning of this symbolism? Why does God choose, when addressing His people, to speak to them from out of the midst of the cherubim "overshadowing the propitiatory" (Hebrews 9:5)? Why, in like manner, does He show His glory to Ezechiel "upon the chariot of cherubim" (Ecclesiasticus 49:10)

The name cherubim is usually explained as signifying the fullness of knowledge and hence in Ezechiel's vision, the strange forms which appeared to him and which he calls cherubim, were full of eyes. But God's knowledge is infinitely above that of the highest of His creatures, and He it is who with wise providence rules all things, directing them by the ministry of the angels. They are *under* the God of Israel; "His glory went forth...and stood *over* the cherubim." (Ezechiel 10:18)

And because His providence is so swift, and extends to the farthest parts of the world, it is said of Him that "He ascended upon the cherubim and he flew; he flew upon the wings of the winds." (Psalm 17:11) And so in the vision of Ezechiel, there are wheels and a chariot moving in all directions, and the cherubim are they who bear or guide the chariot of the Lord, which is equivalent to saying that God dwells in all heavenly minds, as upon the throne of His Majesty, and as supreme Monarch reigns over them, and through them governs all things with resistless energy. The answers which He gave to Moses from the mercy-seat, called also the *oracle* on that account, were only a particular revelation of the wisdom of God, as displayed in His general providence over His creatures.

The word *cherub* (of which *cherubim* is the Hebrew plural) occurs in yet another striking passage of Holy Scripture, where the Prophet Ezechiel thus addresses Lucifer (for in the person of the King of Tyre, Lucifer is certainly intended): "Thou are a cherub stretched out, and protecting...."

The allusion is to the appearance of the cherubim as designed for the mercy-seat, with outstretched wings protecting it, and the implication is that Lucifer was, by nature, of surpassing excellence as, as it were, a guardian to the rest. He is called, however, not a seraph, although it seems more likely that he was one of the highest of the seraphim; but a cherub, because while he retained the perfection of his natural knowledge, he had fallen away from love. Not, of course, as though the cherubim are lacking in divine love, which results from their transcendent knowledge of God, but because the latter is the characteristic which gives them their distinctive rank among the blessed spirits.

Seraphim

Highest of all the holy angels, on the loftiest pinnacle of heaven, stand the glorious seraphim. Apart from the human nature of the Incarnate Word, and that other masterpiece, God's Blessed Mother, they are the most perfect creation of Divine Wisdom and Omnipotence. They are bright with a radiance which beyond all else, most powerfully and most wonderfully reflects the splendours of the infinite Godhead.

The name itself, seraphim, is by some interpreted, "the exalted ones," but the more common explanation connects it with a root which means "to consume with fire." The flame with which they burn is that of love, and its effects are to enlighten and cleanse.

When Isaias, in his great vision, beheld the Lord on the throne of His Majesty and heard the seraphim as they stood round about crying one to another, "Holy, holy , holy, the Lord God of hosts, all the earth is full of His glory," he was seized with fear at the thought of his own unworthiness and exclaimed, "Woe is me,...because I am a man of unclean lips,...and I have seen with my eyes the King, the Lord of hosts." Then suddenly one of the seraphim flew towards him with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar of the temple, touched the prophet's mouth, and said, "Behold, this hath touched thy lips, and thy iniquities shall be taken away, and thy sin shall be cleansed." (Isaias 6)

This refining flame of love is enkindled in the breasts of the seraphim by their clear vision of the Creator, whom they behold with a depth and penetration of view far greater than is enjoyed by any other of the sacred choirs; and yet it is love, not knowledge, which gives them their name and serves as their distinctive characteristic. That is because love supposes knowledge. It is knowledge which begets

love, and the more ardent and intense is the love, the more profound is the knowledge from which it springs. On the other hand, the notion of knowledge does not of itself imply love, for knowledge may exist without producing love. And hence it is that to designate the most exalted of all the celestial choirs, the more inclusive term, love, is invoked to supply the name seraphim, while that of cherubim is appropriated to the one next in perfection.

So closely associated with the highest order of angels is the idea of love, that we acclaim as a seraph one whose love we would commend as extraordinary in point of intensity and tenderness. Hence the epithet *seraphic* has become inseparable from the name of the lowly and gentle Saint of Assisi, and we even apply the term to the whole order of which he was the founder. For the same reason, that is, on account of the all-pervading spirit of love which animates his writings, we speak of Saint Bonaventure as the Seraphic Doctor.

But it is not merely in the name that Saint Francis is associated with the seraphim. There is also that wonderful story - so beautifully and touchingly related by Saint Bonaventure - the story of the impression upon his hands and feet and side, of the sacred stigmata of Our Lord. For it was a glorious seraph with glittering wings all aflame who appeared to Francis, and as he descended to earth with rapid flight, Francis saw that his hands and feet were nailed to a cross. But as the Saint was deeply touched at this, and filled with tender sympathy, the angel explained to him that the representation was only symbolical, and that just as it was impossible for a seraph to experience physical pain, so it was not in the designs of God that Francis should be a martyr in the ordinary sense of the word, but that his likeness to his Crucified Savior was to be accomplished by the flames of love which should consume his soul. And yet

as the vision left him, the sacred stigmata remained indelibly impressed upon his innocent flesh.

Angels in Attendance - Ministering Angels

The distinction between these two classes of angels is not arbitrary or fanciful. On the contrary, it is scriptural, at least as far as the language itself is concerned. For it is written, "Thousands of thousands ministered to him, and then thousand times a hundred thousand stood before him." (Daniel 7:10)

The numbers employed by the Prophet are no doubt indefinite in both cases, and intended to convey the notion of a multitude quite beyond the power of human words to express. The second number, however, is the larger of the two; from which we seem to be justified in inferring that they who stand in ceaseless attendance upon the Most High, are a vastly greater throng than they whose duty it is to busy themselves with such functions in the outer world, as have to do with the salvation of mankind.

But the question at once arises, are the two classes of blessed spirits mutually exclusive? Do they who stand before the throne never go forth to minister? Do they who minister never swell the ranks of those who form the inner court of the great King?

And here Catholic theologians are divided. Some deny that



there is any such fundamental distinction and hold that all from the highest to the lowest are sent to minister, while all likewise appear before the throne. Saint Thomas, on the contrary, upholds a set and rigid distinction between the two orders of angels, and will not allow that the higher classes of blessed spirits may, even by exception, be sent to minister. And in this he seems to follow the teaching of the great classic, "The Celestial Hierarchy," with which Saint Gregory is substantially in accord.

Suarez, on the other hand, while maintaining a strict distinction between the two classes of angels, is not as unyielding in the matter of exceptions. He would allow that, at times, even the most exalted of the angels may be sent forth as ambassadors from the heavenly court, when there is question of doing honour to some great mystery, such as the Incarnation, the Nativity, or the Resurrection of Our Lord, or of showing special favour to some distinguished friend of God.

There are, however, certain texts of Scripture which are not easily made to harmonize with the idea of a real distinction between the two classes. Thus Saint Paul, contrasting the angels with Christ, and proclaiming their inferiority as compared with the Son of God, asks, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to minister for them, who shall receive the inheritance of salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14)

Now it hardly seems to be doubtful that the Apostle is here speaking of the angels quite universally, as would appear to be evident both from the language itself and from the purpose in view, which is to exalt Christ above all others. And hence it remains to be explained how those angels who, in the opinion to which we are now referring, are never engaged in any exterior activity, may be said to minister "for those who receive the inheritance of salvation."

The explanation which is given by Saint Thomas and by Suarez is that the higher angels enlighten the lower, and intimate to them the will of God in matters affecting the salvation of souls, and that this activity, although wholly interior, is a true and properly so-called ministry. And if you object that Saint Paul does not merely say that all are ministering spirits, but adds "*sent* to minister," thus implying that they go forth from the presence of God, and directly busy themselves with what appertains to the welfare of man, Suarez replies that the second clause has not the same universality as the first. Saint Paul does not say that *all* are sent, nor is it necessary for his argument. For if all are servants, whereas Christ is the Son, then it is plain that He is above all.

When, then, we distinguish between angels who are ever in attendance upon the King of kings, and those who minister to Him, we do not imply that the former in no sense minister (for in a broader sense they do) but only that they are not employed in exterior works for the welfare of mankind, whether as directing the operations of the lower angels, or as immediately engaged in executing what has been enjoined upon them.

Neither is it to be understood, when we speak of ministering angels, that these are in no sense in attendance upon the Most High. For all alike, enjoy the Beatific Vision according to the words of Our Lord himself, "I say to you, that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 18:10), words which apply directly to the guardian angels of the little ones, but are *a fortiori* to be applied to all the higher orders. Nevertheless, the term *ministering* well serves to distinguish those who in a strict sense minister, being engaged in exterior offices, from those who do so only in the broad sense explained above. On the

other hand, the expression *in attendance* is in a special manner applicable to those whose prerogative it is ever to abide in the Divine Presence, exempt from any outward function, and at all times to receive directly from the Supreme Source of light, the rays which they shed upon the blessed spirits who are of inferior rank.

One remark remains to be made concerning the choir of dominations. These glorious spirits, as the most exalted of ministering angels, are not regularly sent to discharge this or that office in the outer world, whatever they may exceptionally be commissioned to do, but theirs is a condition of superiority or pre-eminence, in virtue of which they intimate to those beneath them what each must do, declaring to them the Divine Will, or in a general way, assigning to them their various functions. And thus the dominations hold a sort of middle place between the angels of the third hierarchy, whose sole occupation is with God himself and His sovereign Majesty, and the rest, on whom it devolves to execute the Will of God in the promotion of the interests of our human race.

Are the Angels Many?

What more striking in nature than the profusion with which her riches are scattered everywhere? Who would undertake to enumerate the blossoms of spring, the bright flowers than enamel the fields in summer, the rich fruits that weigh down the trees at harvest-time? Who can count the stars of heaven? Who can reckon the multitude of the raindrops, which the storm-cloud enfolds in its bosom, or hurls downward to inundate the lands? Who can tell the number of the snow-flakes that fall silently to earth in serried phalanxes in the bleak winter-time, or are tossed and whirled hither and thither, over hill and vale, over river and lake, through lanes and streets, and open fields, in the path of the raging blizzard?



It might be an exaggeration to say that to form to oneself an idea of the multitude of the angels, one must have recourse to comparisons such as these, and yet reputable theologians have thought, and Saint Thomas himself seems in various places to assert, that the number of the angels exceeds that of all material substances.

What we know for certain, because it follows plainly from the words of Holy Writ, is that for us and from our point of view, the angels are a numberless throng. "Is there any numbering of His soldiers?" asks one of the friends of Job. And the expressions employed by Daniel, in describing his vision of

the Ancient of Days sitting upon His Throne, of whom he says that "thousands of thousands ministered to him, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before him," are evidently intended to convey the idea of an indefinite multitude, rather than an exact number. Of these, the former phrase is again used, with a similar meaning, by both Saint Paul and Saint John. (Hebrews 12:22; Apocalypse 5:11)

We might, indeed, argue after the following fashion, to prove how incalculably great is the multitude of the blessed spirits. Our guardian angels are chosen from the lowest choir, which is that of the angels, and as each of us has his guardian angel, distinct from those of other men, it follows that the angels of the lowest choir are at least as numerous as those of our race who live at any given time. That alone would put their number in the billions. And this reckoning, if extended to the past and to the future, so as to embrace the whole history of mankind from the beginning of the world to the end, would add very considerably to an already exceedingly great multitude. It would, in other words, make the number of the angels of the lowest choir alone equal to that of the whole human race.

Now the blessed spirits of the higher choirs are commonly thought to surpass in number those who are beneath them in point of perfection and excellence, and thus it is evident that the angels of the loftiest choir, and much more the aggregate of all the angels, present a simply countless array - not indeed in the sense that they cannot be numbered, or that their number is not known to God and to the angels themselves, but that it quite baffles the power of our human imagination, and cannot be expressed by an ordinary combination of figures.

At the same time it must be admitted that the foundation on which this argument is built is uncertain. We cannot be sure

that the same angel may not be deputed to guard successively a number of different individuals. Some have even thought that the same angel might at one and the same time act as guardian to several human beings. This, however, is very unlikely in itself, on account of the difficulty of such an arrangement, amounting almost to impossibility, and it is also hard to reconcile with the testimonies of the Holy Fathers and less calculated to show forth the power and the liberality of Almighty God.

We must rest satisfied then with knowing in a general way that the angels are a vast and, practically speaking, innumerable throng of glorious spirits, created in such multitudes because it was befitting that infinite Majesty should surround itself with unnumbered hosts of might princes, whose presence should attest the glory of their sovereign Lord, and whose whole being should be at His beck for the immediate accomplishment of His will.

Our Guardian Angels

Catholic Teaching

The angelic nature, being wholly spiritual, is far superior to ours and the very least of the angel is a prince, compared with whom all earthly beauty and wisdom are as dross, and all human might is frailty. It is not, then, a matter of course that they should wait on us, but a dispensation of infinite love, the same which prompted God's own son to come among us, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister."



For he hath given his angels charge over thee, that they keep thee in all thy ways. In their hands they shall bear thee up, lest perhaps thou dash thy foot against a stone. (Psalm 110:11-12)

In the words of the psalmist we find, not only a clear assertion of the fact that the guardianship of men has been entrusted to the holy angels, but the motive also for so loving a dispensation - man's frailty and the dangers to which he is exposed. These might, indeed, of themselves have moved the good angels to sympathize with us, especially when we bear in mind that the main source of danger to us is the warfare which the fallen angels cease not to wage against us. But, as a matter of fact, it is in fulfillment of a sacred trust confided to them by our common Creator, that our guardian angels surround us everywhere with their powerful protection. It is not of their own free choice, but as a solemn duty, that they are ever alert and

active for our welfare.

It might, it is true, be objected that the psalmist is here speaking not of men in general, but of Christ. For the Psalm is Messianic, and certainly the demon so understood the words, and in one of the temptations applied them to Christ. But because the passage quoted is to be understood especially of Christ, as Saint Augustine, Saint Ambrose and others expound it, it does not follow that there is question only of Him. On the contrary, the Fathers commonly interpret it as referring to all mankind, as the opening words of the Psalm would seem to indicate that it does. For there the psalmist asserts, quite universally, that "he who dwells in the aid of the Most High, shall abide in the protection of the God of Jacob," of which protection the guardianship of the holy angels is a singular instance.

So, too, in another passage, the same inspired writer declares in general terms that "the angel of the Lord shall encamp round about them that fear Him, and shall deliver them." (Psalm 33:8)

This, if we confine ourselves to the general statement that by the ineffable providence of God, the angels have been deputed to guard men on their pathway through life, it is, as Suarez says, a doctrine of faith, for it is expressly contained in Holy Scripture. If, going a step further, we assert that each individual of the human race has a guardian angel appointed to watch over him from birth, we are still enunciating a Catholic belief, not indeed contained explicitly in Holy Writ, nor defined by the Church as an article of faith, but so universally received and with such solid foundation in Holy Scripture, as interpreted by the Fathers, that it cannot without great rashness be called into question. In fact, to deny it might also be termed erroneous.

Certainly our Divine Lord says, speaking of little children, "See that you despise not one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 18:10) And Saint Jerome, commenting on these words, infers from them the great dignity of our souls, seeing that each has from birth an angel deputed to watch over it. And the holy Doctor argues to the same effect from the words of the disciples, when Peter stood at the gate and knocked, after his miraculous escape from prison. They could not credit the message of the portress, that it was Peter himself, and they said, "It is his angel" (Acts 12:15), showing thereby what was already the common persuasion of the faithful.

Another passage of Holy Writ, which the Fathers quote to prove that we have each our guardian angel, is that wherein Jacob, in blessing the sons of Joseph, says, "The angel that delivered me from all evils, bless these boys." In their comments on this text, and on those previously quoted, Catholic interpreters are quite at one. The texts all alike imply the doctrine universally received in the Church to the effect that not only are angels commissioned in a general way to guard mankind, but as Saint Anselm says, "every soul, at the moment when it is infused into the body, is entrusted to the keeping of an angel."

The language of Holy Writ is perhaps not as explicit as we could wish, but the traditional understanding of the inspired word, as conveyed to us by the Fathers of the Church, of whom many others might be quoted, leaves nothing to be desired. Yet, admitting that each individual is provided with a guardian angel, it might still be questioned whether the same angel may not be at once the guardian of two or more. To this we can only say that the view according to which each one's angel is distinct from this neighbour's, and deputed to guard him exclusively, is more in keeping with

the language of the Fathers, and more in harmony with the common understanding of the faithful. Also, the liberality and munificence of Almighty God are more apparent in this view and it also avoids the difficulty (amounting, it would see, to an impossibility) of having one angel serve as guardian to individuals dwelling apart in distant places.

There have been some who would have restricted this salutary guardianship of the angles to those who are destined one day to share with them the happiness of heaven, or to those at least who are in the state of grace. But the well-considered, common opinion of Catholic theologians, basing their views on the concordant language of the Fathers, assigns a guardian angel indiscriminately to just man and sinner, to believer and unbeliever, to Christian and heathen alike.

For God denies to no man sufficient help to save his soul and in the actual order of divine Providence, the guardianship of the holy angels is one of the elements which go to make up that sufficient help. For God permits men good and bad, to be tempted by the demon, though of themselves they are unable to resist the tempter successfully. Hence He also provides them with the assistance and protection of the holy angels, so as to supply for their insufficiency.

And just as the angels guard those who have never had faith or sanctifying grace, so too, they continue their guardianship over those who have lost the faith or have fallen away from grace. In fact, this is one of those special provisions of the divine mercy, whereby God ever seeks the reconciliation of the sinner and urges him to turn from his evil ways.

Then, too, even the just and the elect are exposed to the assaults and temptations of the evil one. Why should not the

good angels solicit the sinner and by holy inspirations and illuminations seek to bring about his return to God, or at least prevent him from sinking to even lower depths of sin? Either result would be apt to contribute greatly to the welfare of the just, by removing from them to a greater or less degree the bad example of the wicked, which often has so baneful an influence on the lives of others.

When Our Angels' Guardianship Begins

The little child whom our Blessed Lord set in the midst of the disciples, as a model of humility, innocence and simplicity, was surely a very young child and free from the strife of the passions, as Saint Chrysostom insists. Saint Ambrose, too, holds that while he lacked the use of reason, he was also without guilt of any kind. And Saint Jerome says that Our Lord proposed him as a pattern of innocence, because he was not of an age at which he could sin.

And so when our Blessed Lord uttered a solemn warning against scandalizing "these little ones," and gave as a motive the dignity which they derive from the guardianship of the angels, His words are a convincing argument to show that the angels are deputed to guard men from their very infancy and, as Saint Jerome rightly infers, from birth. For, once we admit that the use of reason is not a condition, we have no grounds for restricting the guardianship to any particular period of infancy.

But while it is commonly said that each one has from birth a guardian angel appointed to watch over him, it may be disputed whether by birth we should not here understand the very moment when the soul is infused into the body, and the child begins to have its own distinct being and personality, already a wayfarer on the path to heaven and capable of incurring for itself, the guilt of original sin. A

special angel, deputed to guard it from that period, would be more particularly interested in its welfare, and would exercise over it a more loving care. This is the opinion of Father Suarez, as well as that of Saint Bonaventure, and others and, as it would seem, of the Angelic Doctor.

Special Guardian Angels

There can be no reasonable doubt, if we consider the language of Scriptures together with the common teaching of the Holy Fathers, that kingdoms and dioceses also have their guardian spirits. It is likewise probable that popes and kings, and prelates and other rulers have, over and above the angel guardian assigned to them from birth, a special angel of a higher order, whose place it is to guide them according to the dictates of that higher prudence which their public duties call for. This angel would be of the choir of the archangels, or perhaps, in the case of the greatest kings and pontiffs, of the order of the principalities.

It is, furthermore, a weighty opinion that special angels are charged with the care of the various portions of the universe - of what used to be known as the elements - that is, earth, fire, water, air, and of the different species of material things, both animate and inanimate. This is not without foundation in Holy Scripture, and especially in the Apocalypse, where we read of "the angels of the waters," and of "the angel who had power over fire." And it is also the opinion of Saint Thomas, Saint Augustine, and other Fathers, and is defended by Suarez.

What They Do for Us

The most obvious service which our angels render us is to guard us from harm. It is implied in the very name of guardian angels, and they do indeed watch over us and

keep us from a thousand perils of both soul and body - perils of which, oftentimes, we ourselves are unaware. And this they effect either by removing the occasion of danger, or by prompting us to avoid it. They flash into our minds rays of heavenly light and stir our hearts with salutary emotions, setting before us in an attractive manner the good they would have us do or moving us to dread and to shun the evil which they would have us flee.

Again, our good angels hold the demons in check, not suffering them to tempt us as often or as violently as they fain would do. In fact, as a certain pious author observes, whom Suarez quotes approvingly, the evil spirits dare not assail us with our angel looking on; it is only when he hides himself, in order to let them tempt us for our soul's profit, that they make bold to attack us.

Then, too, especially, they offer our prayers and good works to God. For thus the Angel Raphael said to the elder Tobias, "When thou did pray with tears, and did bury the dead...I offered thy prayer to the Lord." (Tobit 12:12) So Saint John says,

And another angel came, and stood before the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given to him much incense...and the smoke of the incense of the prayers of the saints ascended up before God from the hand of the angel. (Apocalypse 8:3-4)

Again, Jacob in his vision saw the angels ascending and descending; ascending, to bear to God the prayers of mankind, descending to bring to men the answer to their prayers.

And when we say that our guardian angels present our prayers and our good works to God, we mean that they unite

their prayers with ours, to give them greater efficacy. Indeed, they cease not to entreat God in our behalf, and this constant intercession for us is one of the chief benefits coming to us from the guardianship of the holy angels. But while all the angels pray for us, our guardian angel does so with special earnestness by reason of the ties that bind us to him more closely than to the rest of the blessed spirits.

Sometimes, however, it is the duty of our guardian angels to chastise and punish us, when it is expedient for the welfare of our souls. And here we must distinguish such punishments as are penalties and nothing else, and those which have for their motive the amendment of the sinner, and are called medicinal. To these should be added yet another class of penalties if they may be called so, which imply no fault on the part of the person suffering them, but are merely trials sent for his greater spiritual profit.

The first species of punishments proceed, not from the mercy, but from the outraged justice of God, and are intended to strike terror into the hearts of all who come to know of them. These are commonly inflicted by the evil spirits, whom God in such cases uses as His instruments. Yet at times we see even the good angels employed as the agents of God's wrath. It was so in the case of Sodom and Gomorrha. The two holy angels who befriended Lot and brought him with his wife and daughters safely out of Sodom, then brought down fire and brimstone from heaven to consume the wicked cities of the plain.

It was a good angel who stretched forth his hand over Jerusalem to destroy it for David's sin of enumerative his people, and only spared it because God was appeased by the repentance and entreaties of His servant. It was also an angel of the Lord who slew the host of Sennacherib, the proud and boastful enemy of Israel.

It would, however, seem more in keeping with the beneficent office of our guardian angels, that God should make use of them for the infliction of medicinal chastisements - that is, of those which have for their end the cure of our spiritual ailments - as well as of that other class of sufferings, which are meant to try the virtue of the servants of God, and afford to others an example of patience. And if at times, in inflicting these, God is pleased to employ the evil spirits, as in the case of Job, or of Sara, wife of the younger Tobias, not to speak of numerous instances with which we meet in the lives of the saints, it is likely that in such cases the demons act under the supervision of the good angels, and only as these permit or compel them to act.

But the divine chastisements may fall upon communities as well as upon individuals, and in such cases they proceed from the guardian angel of the community in question, when the object intended is the common good; or from the demons, when the punishment is simply the effect of the wrath of God or when it falls within the scope of some more universal providence. Here, too, the good angels may intervene either as constraining the demons to act as instruments of the divine justice, or as themselves directly inflicting the penalties. In the former case the action would be proper to the powers, whose special function it is to coerce the evil spirits; in the latter it would belong to the choir of virtues, whose prerogative it is to do such things as are of their nature extraordinary and, so to say, miraculous.

After Death

The guardianship of our good angels, properly speaking, ends with death. For at death all dangers cease, nor is there further opportunity for spiritual progress. And yet our

angels' loving care surrounds us still. If we are so happy at that dread moment as to be found without spot or wrinkle, if we are free from every stain of guilt, and if our debt of punishment for sin has been fully paid, then our guardian angel will joyfully conduct us to our heavenly home. Such is the prayer of our fond mother, the Church, to reach and every one of her children whom she is called upon to aid at the hour of the last supreme struggle. "Assist him, ye Saint of God," she prays, "come forth to meet him, ye Angels of the Lord. Receive his soul, and present it in the sight of the Most High."

For our own good angel will be joined by troops of blessed spirits, who will rejoice at our happy lot, and will gladly applaud the fortunate issue of our warfare with the wicked angels. And hence once more, in the burial service, as the remains of the deceased are being borne to their last resting place, Holy Church bids her ministers chant the touching antiphon,

May the angels escort thee to paradise; at thy coming
may the martyrs welcome thee, and conduct thee to the
holy city Jerusalem. May a Choir of Angels receive thee,
and with Lazarus, once poor, may thou have rest
everlasting.

This is the Lazarus who once sat as a beggar at the rich man's gate, all full of sores, without a crumb to eat, but of whom Our Lord himself assures us that, when he died, he "was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom." (Luke 16:22)

We shall not then be forsaken by our good angel in death, and if, at that solemn hour, there are still certain remains of sin which must be cleansed away in the refining flames of purgatory, some debt of punishment which we have yet to pay to the divine justice, our faithful guardian will conduct

us to the place of expiation, and will often visit and console us in our prison-house, until at last our debt is fully cancelled, and our soul, resplendent with heavenly light and beauty, is read to wing its flight upward to the place of everlasting bliss. How gladly will he then embrace us! How joyfully will he accompany us even to the throne of God and into the midst of the throngs of glorious angels, fellow citizens with us of the heavenly kingdom and joint heirs of its boundless, never-ending joy and peace!

How We Should Requite Their Love

Our guardian angel is our best and oldest friend. He has been with us from our birth, and will abide with us till the end. In all the ups and downs of our life, he has never once departed from our side. Even our coldness towards him, our utter forgetfulness of him, our rank ingratitude, have not been able to drive him from us. Our sins themselves, however heinous, have not silenced his voice of admonition and warning. They have only served to move him to pray more urgently for us, to chide and rebuke us, and to endeavour to rouse within us sentiments of bitter remorse, in order to bring us back once more to the narrow path.

We may choose for ourselves this one or that one among the saints, to be our specially beloved patron, but God himself has picked for us our guardian angel, and has given to him a very particular affection for us, and a very deep solicitude for our best welfare.

Behold, I will send my angel, who shall go before thee, and keep thee in thy journey, and bring thee into the place that I have prepared. Take notice of him, and hear his voice, and do not think him one to be condemned; for he will not forgive when thou hast sinned, and my name is in him. But if thou wilt hear his voice, and do all

that I speak, I will be an enemy to thy enemies, and will afflict them that afflict thee. (Exodus 23:20-22)

These words were spoken by the Lord to his chosen people when they were on their way to the Promised Land. But we know that everything that befell them was symbolic of God's dealings with his Christian people, and the Church herself applies these words to our guardian angels.

Here, then, we have clearly pointed out to us our duty towards our guardian angel. God wants us above all things to be docile to his voice, and not to imagine that we can disregard it with impunity. We owe him, doubtless, love and respect and gratitude, but we show these best by our fidelity in following at all times his guidance. His voice may be still and small to those who open wide their ears to the promptings of the passions, and of a worldly spirit, but by one who listens it can be distinctly heard above all inward strife, and the din and tumult from without.

Saint Bernard, commenting on the words of Psalm 90 - already quoted, "He hath given his angels charge over thee, that they keep thee in all they ways," - lays down three duties that we owe to our guardian angels. The first is reverence, which the mere presence of so exalted a being demands of us. If we had an abiding sentiment of reverence for him, we should never permit ourselves to do aught in his presence that we should fear to do before the eyes of a man whom we respected.

The second duty is one of devotion, in return for all his affectionate love for us. We cannot doubt its depth and sincerity. It is enough for him that God has made us in His own image, that He has so loved us as to give His only begotten Son for us, that He has confided us to the keeping of the angels, as younger brethren of and future co-heirs

with these holy spirits, in the heavenly kingdom.

The third duty is that of unbounded confidence in his watchful guardianship and protection. No real harm can come to us if we trust in him. He is ever on the alert; the demons can never take him by surprise. He is endowed with heavenly wisdom and will surely direct us aright amid the deceits and snares of the evil one. He has undoubted might to repel even the fiercest assaults of our enemies if we but recommend ourselves to him. We may go forward fearlessly under his protection, but we ought to strive to render ourselves deserving of it by frequently appealing to him in our various needs.

There is yet another duty which we owe to the guardian angels in general. It is one of reverence for those over whom they watch, how little soever and insignificant they may otherwise appear to be. Our Divine Lord makes the dignity which comes to the little ones from the tutelage of their guardian angels, a very pressing motive for respecting them and avoiding aught that might prove a scandal or a stumbling block to them. And Saint Hilary, apropos of Our Lord's warning on this head, has the following eloquent passage,

He has imposed the appropriate bond of mutual love, for those especially who have truly believed in the Lord. For the angels of the little ones daily see God; because the Son of man has come to save what was lost. Hence, the Son of man saves, and the angels see God, and the angels of the little ones preside over the prayers of the faithful. That the angels preside, we have on unquestionable authority. The angels then daily present to God the prayers of those who are saved through Christ. Hence it is a dangerous thing to despise one whose desires and petitions are borne to the eternal and

invisible God through the dazzling ministry of waiting angels.

But if regard for their blessed guardians forbids us to show contempt for the little ones, surely our interest in their spiritual and physical welfare, whether proceeding from general motives or from some particular relationship which binds us to them, may well prompt us to pray often for them to their guardian angels, and to recommend them earnestly to those powerful protectors whom God himself has charged to watch over them and to keep them in all their ways. Parents and teachers who adopted this practice would doubtless quickly see the effect of their prayers in the greater docility of the children, and their more rapid progress in knowledge and in virtue.

For ourselves, too, devotion to our guardian angels cannot fail to be the source of many heavenly favours, but it should especially insure to us the possession of three precious gifts which are strikingly characteristic of the holy angels. The first is that of walking constantly in the presence of God. Never for a moment are they distracted from it. They are not allured by the pleasures of the world, they are not disturbed by the din and tumult of human passions. Their gaze is ever riveted on the face of their Creator, and their mind is absorbed in the contemplation of His unspeakable beauty.

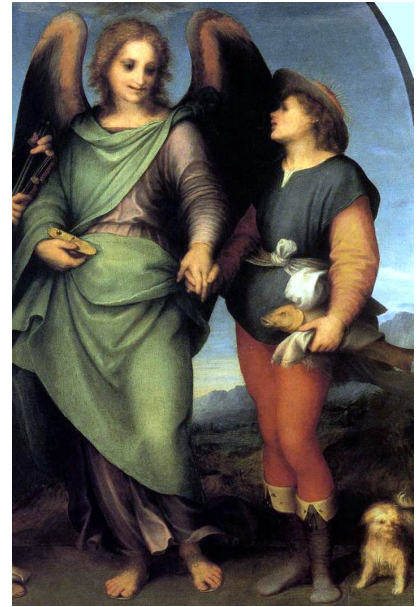
The second treasure which this devotion should secure us is a true spirit of obedience. The angels are ever ready at God's beck, and the accomplishment of His will is their greatest joy. They will gladly ask for us a like devotedness, and the habitual proposing to ourselves of their example will be a powerful incentive to us to endeavour to imitate them.

Lastly, the pearl of the virtues, holy purity, will be safe under their protection. It is called the angelic virtue, and the

angels are eager to see us become by its practice most like unto themselves. The struggle is a hard one - in some cases it is fierce and unrelenting - but by the grace of God and the assistance of our good angel, whom we should lovingly invoke while the combat lasts, the victory will be ours, and what a glorious victory it will be! To have overcome in our frail flesh and in spite of the treachery of the flesh, which is arrayed with the demons against us, all the wiles and malice of our wicked foe, and to have kept intact amid the most violent assaults the priceless heritage which we carry in vessels of clay - that, to be sure, is a triumph to which we may holily and wholesomely aspire, and for which we shall remain forever indebted to the encouragement and support given to us in the conflict by our ever-loving, ever-faithful guardian angel.

Angels' Names

For most of us, knowledge of a person that does not include knowledge of his name is hardly more than half knowledge. There may be little in a name, especially as names are usually given without reference to personal qualities and endowments, and merely as labels, so to say, to distinguish one person from another. Yet, even so, a name has often associations of a hallowed or patriotic, a literary or historical nature, and when the name is recalled, all these are conjured up so that the name serves as an epitome of the person's life and character. That is why some names possess such magic power, electrifying vast assemblies and stirring men's souls to the highest pitch of enthusiasm, or nerving them to deeds of bravery and heroism.



And it is not we alone who set such store by names. For God himself would seem to attach great importance to them. He is was who, in the beginning, gave their names to the sea and to the land, and who brought all the beasts of the earth and all the fowl of the air to Adam to see what he would call them. He again it was who changed the name of Abram to Abraham, and of Jacob to Israel; who dictated the name of the Precursor of Our Lord, and bestowed on the Redeemer of mankind the thrice holy Name of Jesus. He has been pleased, too, to reveal to us His own incommunicable Name. For to Moses, who asked of Him His name, He replied, "I am who am." And when Moses declared his mission to the

people of Israel, he was to say to the, "He that is hath sent me to you."

Who then will find fault with us if we crave to know the names of the holy angels? Who will take from our joy in the few that we know by telling us that they are not really the names of those glorious spirits at all, being in truth a mere description of their character or special attributes? As if it were not a common thing originally for a name to be given to a person by reason of some similar appropriateness! Rather, such are the best sort of names.

But alas, it has not seemed good to the Lord of all things to reveal to us more than three names among all those which are borne by the countless myriads of the angelic host. To greet each angel by his name, and to enjoy that familiarity with the blessed spirits which this implies, is a happiness reserved for us in our heavenly home.

Meanwhile, we must be content to have been taught the names of Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, and gratefully invoke them again and again. Others we meet with in fiction and in poetry, and that of Uriel we find the apocryphal third book of Esdras, which, however, lacks the divine authority of the inspired writings. So the name of Victor is assigned as that of the angel who was wont to visit and instruct Saint Patrick, and still others might be culled from the lives of the saints, but not none of them could we have the certainty which is afforded by divine revelation.

On the contrary, Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael are names which are found in Holy Scripture, and which have ever been held in veneration in the Church of God. They are invoked in the Litany of the Saints after the name of the Queen of Angels, and before all the rest of the blessed. Saint Michael is exceptionally honoured by a two-fold feast, one in May,

the other in September; while Saint Gabriel and Saint Raphael whose festivals have hitherto been kept only in particular localities and by special privilege, are henceforth to be glorified by having their Mass and Office extended to the Universal Church.

Michael the Archangel - In the Church

The Church of Christ has ever paid special honour to the glorious Archangel Michael, whom in her liturgy she hails "Prince of the heavenly host." His name is the war cry with which, in the primeval mighty battle, he smote the proud followers of Lucifer and their chief, and cast them down out of heaven into the depth of the pit. "I will ascend into heaven," was the boast of the rebel angel; "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God - I will be like the most High." (Isaias 14:13-14) But as a flash of lightning came the challenge, "Who is like God?" and the faithful angels, with Michael at their head, grappled with the rebellious hosts and prevailed against them so that their place was no longer found in heaven.



That battle is still waged here in this world. The Church of God is the object of constant and violent assaults on the part of the powers of darkness, but the holy angels are arrayed on her side, and Michael is ever at hand to champion her cause against the fury of her envenomed foes, and to conduct her to a glorious victory. He is the guardian and protector of the Church, as he was formerly of the Synagogue, "your prince," as the angel who spoke to Daniel called him, and "Michael, the great prince, who stands for the children of thy people." (Daniel 12:1) No harm can come

to them so long as he, "standard-bearer of salvation," stands a firm and impregnable wall against the fiercest attacks of Satan. Michael vanquished Lucifer once for all in the dim and distant ages, and the verdict of that battle will never be reversed.

The Church commends her children to the great Archangel in life and more particularly in death. "Define us in the conflict," she cries out to him, "that we may not perish in the awful judgement." And as the crisis in the combat approaches, and the departing soul is at the last grips with the foe, she prays that "Saint Michael, the Archangel of God who has deserved to be the Prince of the heavenly host," may admit her child to the kingdom of heaven, and that all the holy angels of God may come to meet him, and conduct him to the heavenly city, Jerusalem.

So, too, after death, the solicitude of holy Mother Church still follows her dear ones, and again she asks the intervention of the Archangel Michael in their behalf. Her prayer occurs in the strikingly beautiful Offertory of the Mass for the Dead, she prays,

O Lord Jesus Christ, King of glory, deliver the souls of all the faithful departed from the pains of hell and from the deep pit. Deliver them from the lion's mouth; let not tartarus swallow them up; let them not fall into the darkness, but let Saint Michael, the standard-bearer, introduce them to the holy light, which Thou did promise of old to Abraham and to his seed.

Nor is this the only mention of Saint Michael that is found in the Mass. Every time the Holy Sacrifice is offered, the priest in the general confession which makes at the foot of the altar, and the people after him, twice invoke the intercession of the great Archangel, and the people do the same once

more at the moment of the Holy Communion draws nigh. Again, in the solemn Mass, when the incense is blessed at the Offertory, the celebrant prays that "through the intercession of Blessed Michael the Archangel, standing at the right of the altar of incense, the Lord may deign to bless the incense, and receive it in an order of sweetness."

For many years, too, we have been offering after every low Mass a special prayer to Saint Michael for his powerful assistance against the arch-enemy of our souls, and there occurs in it a phrase, "Rebuke him, O God," which, while it comes in with a certain abruptness, is yet particularly forcible as containing a direct allusion to the victory of the Archangel over Satan in the famous encounter. For, as Saint Jude in his Epistle (5:9) reminds us, "when Michael the Archangel, disputing with the devil, contended about the body of Moses, he dared not bring against him the judgement of railing speech, but said, 'The Lord command thee.'"

The incident to which the apostle refers is not found elsewhere in Holy Writ, but must have been known by revelation, and handed on by tradition, or through some inspired writing long since lost. It is thought that the occasion was this - after the death of the great law-giver, the devil would have had him buried where the Jews might come in crowds to pay homage to his remains, hoping thereby to seduce them to idolatry. But the Archangel Michael, knowing their proclivity to this sin, sought to prevent it by laying the body in some secret resting place. And yet, with that modesty and meekness which so befits the truly great, he would not revile Satan for his resistance, but appealed to God to coerce him by His power. Not, to be sure, that the Archangel feared the devil, whom he might himself easily have restrained, but that he judged it an unbecoming thing to wrangle with the evil one, or by stinging words to rebuke his

pride and malice.

One of the two festivals which the Church keeps in honour of Saint Michael, that of the eighth of May, is celebrated in memory of an apparition of the Archangel, which took place on Monte Gardano, in the southeastern part of Italy, in the province of Foggia, and in what is called "the spur," there a mountainous promontory juts out into the Adriatic Sea. The Archangel made known to the Bishop of Sipontum, now Manfredonia, in whose diocese the Mount is situated, that the spot was under his protection, and the Bishop, in consequence, came there with a throng of people, and finding a cave in the mountain side, hollowed out in the shape of a church, began to use it as a place of religious service until it grew to be a famous and much frequented shrine of the Archangel.

About a century later, that is, c.589, after an inundation of the Tiber, the city of Rome was visited with a frightful pestilence. In the following year, Pope Saint Gregory the Great was leading a penitential procession to Saint Peter's Basilica to obtain the cessation of the plague, bearing in his hands at the time, a picture of our Blessed Lady, when he came to the Aelian bridge which connected the tomb of Hadrian with the city, and as he raised his eyes toward that massive structure, he beheld on its summit an angel sheathing a bloody sword, while chorus of angels round about chanted the anthem, *Regina coeli* - "Queen of heave, rejoice! He whom thou was meet to bear, hath arisen as He said, Alleluia!" To which the Pope responded, "Pray for us to God, Alleluia!"

A moment before the people had been dropping to the ground, even at the side of the Holy Pontiff, but now the plague was at an end, and in commemoration of the event, a shrine was erected on the top of the mausoleum by Pope

Boniface IV, successor to Saint Gregory, and dedicated to Saint Michael. Later the shrine was replaced by a statue, many times destroyed, and as often renewed, and the Moles Hadriani acquired the name of the Castle of Sant' Angelo, while the bridge was called Ponte San Angelo.

It was the great Archangel Saint Michael also who spoke to the simple peasant girl, Jeanne d'Arch, when she was but a child of thirteen years, and whose voice summoned her from her flocks to the command of armies. His was one of the "voices" which she heard repeatedly, but he did not come alone. He was accompanied by a troop of angels, and she saw them, as she told her judges, as plainly as her eyes then beheld her hearers. At first she was seized with fear, but later, as often as her heavenly visitors departed from her, she used to weep and pray that they might carry her away with them.

Michael the Archangel - Amid the Angelic Hosts

In the preceding chapter we saw how Holy Church gives to the Archangel Michael the highest place among the blessed spirits. For she calls him "Chief (or Prince) of the heavenly army," and this she does while celebrating a feast in honour of all the holy angels. It would seem, then, an obvious inference that she regards him simply as the first and foremost of the whole heavenly host, nor does there appear at first blush any reason for not accepting the inference.



And yet if we recall what was said in a previous chapter about the two classes of angels - those who assist and those who serve - we shall see that a serious difficulty arises for whoever admits this distinction. For Saint Michael, whom the Church honours, is their guardian of the Church, as he was formerly of the Synagogue, and is often sent to earth in the interest of the Church and of souls. But the three highest choirs of the angels are never sent, nor are they occupied with exterior things, but are ever absorbed in the contemplation of God, from whose presence they never go forth.

Hence, Saint Thomas and others would have it that Saint Michael belongs to the choir of principalities, or possibly to that of the archangels. And Suarez deems it likely that he is the first and highest of the principalities, who precede in

dignity the angels and archangels, and have care of provinces and kingdoms. And because these glorious spirits take the leading part of the warfare between the good and bad angels, which is continued here below for the welfare or the ruin of the human race, they are chiefly meant when it is said that "Michael and his angels fought with the dragon."

Yet Suarez, endeavouring to reconcile this view with that would appear to be the common opinion of the faithful, distinguishes between the immediate guardian of the Church and of the Synagogue, who has often been sent, and is still sent, on various missions for the advantage of God's people, and that other glorious angel who first sounded the war cry, "Who is like God?" and led the hosts of faithful angels against Lucifer and his followers in the battle which was fought in heaven from the beginning, and ended in the utter rout of the enemies of God.

In this conflict all the angels were engaged, even those of the most exalted choirs, because their own interests and the divine honour were at stake. The ranks, too, of the fallen angels would seem to have been recruited largely from the higher orders, if we may argue from Saint Paul's words. (Ephesians 6) The prime leader, then, of the angels who remained loyal to their Maker, must surely have been of the highest of the seraphim, even as Lucifer, the rebel chief, was one of the highest, if not the very highest, of all the angels.

It is not possible to speak more precisely or more definitely on this point. We cannot be sure that any one particular angel was positively highest, as there may have been several individuals equally endowed. This, of course, is on the supposition that the angels do not all differ specifically. For if they do, then the angel of the highest species will also be the highest of the angels, there being no other to share his specific perfection. If, on the contrary, the highest

species of the seraphim comprises two or more individuals, these may be equally gifted, and it may be that none is higher or more perfect than his fellows.

In this case, Michael, the zealous champion of the honour of the Most High, while in natural gifts inferior neither to Lucifer, nor to any of the other seraphim, may in point of merit, and by reason of his zeal, be superior to all the rest. Nor will it be inconsistent with his exalted rank to discharge the office of guardian and protector of the Church, which we associate with his name, if we say that its functions are exercised by that glorious Archangel, not directly by himself, but indirectly, and under this high command, through the ministry of the lower angels.

To him we may confidently appear in our own private struggles with the power of evil, and still more in behalf of the Church in that bitter warfare which the spirits of darkness cease not to wage against her. If we are devoted to him in life, he will come to receive our souls in death, and to admit us to our heavenly home. For God has delivered to him the souls of all the saints, that he may conduct them to the paradise of exultant joy. He is God's ambassador for the souls of the just - "Michael, marshal of paradise, whom the fellow-citizens of the angels honour."

The Angel Gabriel

In the Collect of the Mass which is appointed to be read on the feast of the Archangel Gabriel, Holy Church calls attention to the choice which God made of his glorious spirit, in preference to all the other angels, to announce the great mystery of the Incarnation. And certainly it was a singular privilege.

God had indeed sent His angels with messages to men on many notable occasions, but when, in the whole course of the ages, was there an embassy like that, whose purpose was to declare to the world that the blessed fullness of time had come at last, and that God's own Son was about to take to Himself our human nature, and to begin the work of our redemption? Or when was there any one so worthy of a message from on high as she who was full of grace, and blessed among women, and who had been chosen to be the Mother of God, and the future Queen of Heaven?

Is it not then most natural to conclude that Gabriel, the bearer of the joyful taking, must have been one of the mightiest and most glorious of all the blessed angels? Else why should he have been chosen for so sublime a mission, rather than others worthier than he?

His name is interpreted the "strength of God," and hence it was most appropriate that the announcement of the



accomplishment of our redemption through the mystery of the Word made flesh should come through him. For the Incarnate Word, Christ Jesus, is also the power of God, as well as the wisdom of God, according to the apostle, though, of course, in a higher and fuller sense, than any, even the loftiest, of His creatures.

We are not told that it was the Angel Gabriel who appeared in sleep in Joseph, and quieted his doubts about his virgin spouse, though this seems most likely, but on the other hand, we know that it was he who foretold to Zachary the birth of the Baptist, and revealed the name whereby the latter was to be called, and took from Zachary for a time the power of speech, because he had distrusted his word instead of accepting it with ready faith.

Again, it was the same glorious archangel who, some five centuries previously, had predicted to Daniel the precise time of the coming of the Saviour of mankind. Thus we see the Angel Gabriel closely associated with the great and consoling mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God - a fact, surely, which ought greatly to endear him to the hearts of us all, while our devotion to him should have the effect of making us grow more and more in the knowledge and love of our Divine Redeemer.

And who among the blessed spirits is honoured in the Church of Christ as is the Angel Gabriel? We learn to lisp his words at our mother's knee, for the prayer which is dearest to us after the Our Father, and which, along with it, our lips are taught to utter even ere the light of reason dawns, is made up chiefly of the words spoken by the Angel Gabriel to Mary. It is also the dearest to Mary's heart, reminding her, as it does, of that delightful interview with the Archangel, which brought such joy, with ineffable glory, to her, and such plenitude of salvation to us.

What delight, what accidental glory must come to the chosen spirit who, as God's ambassador, first addressed those words of greeting to the ever blessed Virgin, when he hears his salutation repeated not only again and again in the liturgy of the Church, but millions upon millions of times every day by the simple faithful everywhere throughout the wide, wide world! We cannot honour Mary by devoutly reciting the prayer that is most pleasing to her without at the same time honouring the glorious Archangel who was God's instrument in her exaltation.

There is, moreover, a familiar form of prayer, which is called the *Angelus* because in Latin it begins with that word, and which is recited by all devout Christians morning, noon and night, in memory of the mystery of our Lord's Incarnation and Mary's part in it. It consists of three Hail Marys, each introduced by a versicle and response, and the whole is usually concluded by the prayer, "Pour forth, we beseech thee," etc.

This form of prayer, beginning with mention of the angel who brought the glad tidings to Mary, ends with a further allusion to him and to his message, and the second versicle and response contain Mary's reply, addressed by her to the angel, who is, of course, the Archangel Gabriel.

It is hard to persuade oneself that this glorious being, so singularly honoured by Almighty God, can belong to any but the highest order of blessed spirits, that is, the seraphim. And in fact he is ranked among them by eminent theologians, some even contending that he is the highest of all, although this runs counter to the common view, which assigns the most exalted place to Michael and acclaims him Prince of the heavenly host.

There are those, on the other hand, who hold strictly to the theory that the highest orders are made up of assisting angels, who are never sent on errands to mankind. Hence they infer that Gabriel, who was sent to Daniel, to Zachary, and to Mary, must be one of the inferior or ministering angels, among whom they are willing to grant him a lofty place, some reckoning him to be one of the archangels, others, one of the principalities, and perhaps the chief of these.

This view is held by theologians of the greatest repute, such as Saint Gregory, Saint Thomas, Saint Bonaventure, Suarez, etc. But there are others of scarcely less renown who maintain the opposite opinion, as for instance, the Master of the Sentences, Duns Scotus, Durandus, Gregory de Valencia, Molina, and Salmeron. Saint Bernard, too, although elsewhere he expresses himself otherwise, in commenting on the gospel narrative of the Annunciation, puts it forward as his opinion that Gabriel is not one of the lesser angels, and he argues to this effect from his name, which means, as we have already remarked, "the strength of God," or something similar, and from the fact that he is sent directly by God Himself, and not through a higher angel acting as intermediary. It was his own excellence, Saint Bernard thinks, that won for him both the name he bears, and the office that was entrusted to him.

And surely, as Saint Gregory himself observes, "it was but proper that for this ministry the highest angel should come, seeing that he brought tidings of the greatest of all events."

Cornelius a Lapide, one of the leading commentators on Holy Scripture, argues at some length in his exposition of *Daniel* 9:22 to show that Gabriel belongs to the order of the seraphim and is one of the foremost princes of the heavenly court. He cites, without fully assenting to them, the eight

proofs, or rather congruities, adduced by Cardinal Mark Viguier in support of his contention that Gabriel is the first and highest of all the angels.

One of these is the apparent impossibility of the Incarnation, rendering it desirable, if not imperative, that the dignity and authority of the messenger announcing it should be such as to gain for it a readier credence. Another is derived from the angel's name. "Gabriel" means "the strength of God," or "God has strengthened me," or "God is my strength." He is, then, the mightiest and the foremost of the angels - between him and God there is no intermediary. Finally, to pass over the other proofs, the Cardinal sums up his whole argument as follows: It was proper that for the greatest of God's works, the greatest angel should be sent. But the Incarnation is the greatest of God's works. Therefore, Gabriel, who was sent to announce it, is the greatest of the angels.

As Cornelius a Lapide observes, however, a king does not always send his chief noble on an embassy to pope or emperor, but at times contents himself with dispatching one of the highest rank, even though not the very highest.

Hence, without claiming for the Angel Gabriel the supremacy among all the blessed spirits, we incline very strongly to the opinion that he is one of the highest of their number. And in support of this view, we shall add just one more argument to those already adduced. It is drawn from the unrivalled merit of the lowly Virgin to whom he came as an ambassador from God.

For if, over and above the extraordinary nature of the message of which the angel was the bearer, we consider the person of her to whom he bore the wondrous tidings; if we reflect that he was to deliver the message of the Most High to the most cherished of God's creatures, who far surpassed

in grace and dignity all the orders of blessed spirits, it does indeed seem that we must, perforce, rate very high among the ranks of the most exalted of the seraphim, that privileged bring whom God thus singled out for so enviable a distinction.

In concluding this chapter, it will not be out of place to recall the words of one of the hymns of the Church in praise of the glorious archangels. There is something grandiose both in the language itself and in the picture it suggests. For whatever precisely may be the allusion in the lines,

*Angelus fortis Gabriel, ut hostes
Pellat antiquos, et amica coelo
Quae triumphator statuit per orbem
Templa revisat*

there can be no doubt that there is a grandeur and sublimity in the image of the angel coming to revisit the temples which, with the approval of heaven, he, like a conquering hero, has set up everywhere throughout the world.

The Angel Raphael

Were the story of the Angel Raphael and Tobias, as recorded in Holy Writ, a mere bit of beautiful fiction it would still delight and charm us as few other stories are capable of doing. The singular uprightness of the elder Tobias, his never-failing patience and heroic constancy, enlist at once our affection and sympathy, while the fretfulness of his wife serves as a foil to throw his virtue into a strong and pleasing relief.



On the contrary, the transparent candour and simplicity of the younger Tobias, a reflection of his own thoroughly virtuous soul, make him worthy of association with the heavenly spirits, and thus dispose our minds for the extraordinary familiarity which he enjoys with one of their number during a protracted period of several weeks, as it would seem, and for the miraculous intervention of the angel in his own and his father's behalf.

The preternatural, which exercises so great a spell over the human mind and which is so eagerly sought after, whether by lawful or unlawful means, is here present at every step, and the being around whom it centres is withal of so attractive a personality and so singularly human, that we are at once sweetly and powerfully drawn to listen to the lessons of virtue which he inculcates, if so perchance we too may one day share the blessed companionship of the angels.

Tobias was of the number of the Israelites whom the Assyrian

King Salmanasar led captive out of Galilee to Nineveh, capital of Assyria, some seven centuries before the coming of Our Lord. From his boyhood he had given to his countrymen the example of a most edifying life, and had refused to be drawn with them into the sin of idolatry, remaining ever faithful to the law of his fathers and the worship of the true God.

And God recompensed his fidelity by granting him to find favour with Salmanasar, the king, who allowed him to go wherever he would among his fellow captives and to do as he desired. In this way he was able to render great services to his people in the hour of their trial, and especially to give them many wholesome admonitions.

This he continued to do, even at the imminent risk of his life, during the reign of Sennacherib, son and successor of Salmanasar, who was filled with hatred towards the Israelites and slew many of them, especially after his inglorious retreat from Judea, where an angel of the Lord destroyed his whole army of a hundred and eighty-five thousand in a single night.

Tobias did all he could to relieve his fellow-countrymen in their sore distress, visiting them, consoling them and supplying their needs. But it was particularly by his zeal and charity in burying their dead, that he roused the ire of the King, and it was on a certain day when he had come home wearied out with labour of the kind and had thrown himself down to sleep by the wall of the house, the hot dung falling into his eyes from a swallow's nest, deprived him of his sight.

It was a trial of his patience permitted by God, like the trials of holy Job, and Tobias proved himself similarly faithful in spite of the mockery he had to put up with from his kinsmen.

Nevertheless he prayed God, if it were pleasing to Him, to deliver him by taking him out of this world, and confident that God had heard his prayer, he prepared to send his son to the distant city of Rages to collect a big debt that was owed him by a man of this tribe, named Gabelus.

At the very same time, a virtuous young woman on the name of Sara, a near relative of Tobias, had just been grossly and wantonly insulted by one of her father's servant maids, and she was pouring forth her prayer in the bitterness of her soul to Him who comforts the afflicted and is ever disposed to succour those who seek His aid in a spirit of humble trustfulness.

And the holy angel of the Lord, Raphael, was sent to heal them both, whose prayers at one time were rehearsed in the sight of the Lord. (Tobit 3:25)

Scarcely then had the younger Tobias crossed the threshold of his father's house, in search of some one who could conduct him to Rages where Gabelus dwelt, when the Angel Raphael, disguised as a youth of attractive appearance and clad as for a journey, presented himself and offered to be his guide to the city of Medes, with which, he said, he was thoroughly familiar. Tobias, who was overjoyed at his good fortune, after hastily consulting his father, introduced to him the youth, who wished him joy, assured him of his speedy cure and promised him to conduct his son safely on his journey to and fro. Then to relieve the father's anxiety as to the family to which he belonged, he described himself as "Azarias, the son the great Ananias," and with a prayer from Tobias that God might be with them in their way and that His angel might accompany them, he and the younger Tobias departed. It was this confidence that his son was under the protection of an angel that reconciled Tobias to his absence and enabled him to quiet the misgivings and murmuring of

his wife.

The very first night, the angel delivered his youthful comrade from a monstrous fish which came to devour him, and bade him set aside certain parts of its entrails as useful remedies. The smoke from a bit of the heart broiled over the coals was to be used to humble the pride of the demon, whom the angel was bind, and the gall was to anoint the eyes of the elder Tobias and to restore to him his sight.

At night, the two travellers lodged at the house of Raguel, father of Sara, and upon the advice of the angel, Tobias asked and received the maiden's hand, the angel assuring Raguel that he might safely give her to him, as God had destined her to be his wife, for which reason also it had fared so ill with all her previous suitors. And so the marriage was celebrated with great joy and gladness, Raguel inviting all his friends and neighbours to the wedding-feast.

It is at this point that an incident occurred, which reveals the wonderful condescension of the Angel Raphael. Raguel was insistent with Tobias that he should spend two weeks with him before departing for his home. Tobias, to comply with his earnest wish without increasing the anxiety of his parents at his absence, made bold to ask his devoted friend to go himself to Rages and restore the note of hand to Gabelus and secure from him the money which he owed. And although Tobias would have gasped at his own temerity, had he realized the full significance of his request, the angel readily agreed to the proposal, and set out with four servants for the city of Medes, where he received all the money from Gabelus, and made him come with him to the wedding.

When the marriage-feast had been celebrated with great rejoicing, and with the fear of the Lord, Tobias and his wife,

with all their household and the rich possessions which Raguel had given as Sara's dowry, set out on their way to Nineveh, the angel still accompanying them. But after some days the latter suggested that he and Tobias should go on before, leaving Sara and the rest to follow leisurely behind, and he bade Tobias bring with him a portion of the gall of the fish, which he had laid aside in the early part of his journey, as it would be needed on their return.

It is truly pathetic to see the mother of Tobias sitting day after day by the roadside at the top of a hill which accorded a commanding view, and watching for the coming of her son, until at last she spies him from afar, and runs to bring the good tidings to her husband; and then to see the latter rise quickly and with the aid of a servant, hasten stumbling to meet his son. There is a touch of nature, too, in the account of the dog, which had accompanied his young master, and which now ran on before, as if bringing the news, and showing his joy by fawning and wagging his tail.

With touching modesty, the angel remains in the background, as if not to intrude upon the tender intimacies of the meeting between parents and son, nor is it he who anoints their father's eyes with the gall of the fish and restores to him sight. When the eyes of the elder Tobias once more behold the light, they shall rest first on his own dearly loved son.

And now for seven days the veil is drawn, and we know nothing of what passed between the angel and the happy family that was so blessed with his company. Again when Sara and all the household have arrived in safety, still another seven days are spent in feasting and great joy, and during all this time there is no suspicion on the part of Tobias and the rest that their so signal benefactor is anything more than a virtuous, nobly-bred, discreet, and

most delightful human friend.

But as last the time had come when they must part, and father and son agreed that nothing that they could offer him would be a satisfactory compensation for all that he had done for them. Nevertheless, they called him aside, and begged him to accept for himself the half of all the wealth that had been brought. Then it was that angel, if not with radiant features, at least with voice enkindled, and with words that burned with a celestial fire, broke forth in praise of prayer and fasting and alms deeds, and told the wondering Tobias how when he had prayed with tears, and had left his dinner untouched, and had concealed the dead by day in his house, and had buried them at night, he, the Angel Raphael, had offered his prayer to the Lord.

He would not accept of any earthly recompense. For first, it was not he to whom Tobias was indebted, but to the Lord who had sent him, and besides the presence of God's majesty made him rich enough. "For," said he, "I am the Angel Raphael, one of the seven who stand before the throne." (Tobit 12:15)

No wonder that Tobias and his son were seized with fear at these words, and that "they fell upon the ground on their face." To think that they had hired an angel of the Lord to wait upon them, and had ventured to appraise his services as though he had been but a human workman! But the angel reassured them. While he was with them, he had been there by the will of God. They should therefore bless Him and sing His praises. He had seemed to eat and drink with them, but in reality, his food and drink were of a kind that could not be seen by men. And now it was time for him to return to the Lord who had sent him, while their duty would be to bless Him forever, and to publish all His wonderful works.

Then the angel disappeared, and for three hours Tobias and his son lay prostrate on the ground, blessing God, after which they arose and made known His merciful dealings with them.

It is clear from the marvelous story, of which the above is an abridgement, why the Angel Raphael is the protector of travellers and pilgrims, and as such is specially invoked in the "Itinerary" of the clergy.

It is also evident why he is regarded as the particular patron of the sick, and hence of hospitals and similar institutions. His name itself, which signifies the "medicine of God" and expresses, no doubt, the special gift he has received from God, or the special mission confided to him by God, would seem clearly to designate him for that office. And then there is the cure of Tobias' blindness which shows that the name of the angel is no meaningless one, but that he is in reality a heavenly physician, ready to use his healing power for the advantage of mankind. How appropriate it would be, if Catholic physicians should take him for the patron of their art, and instead of this or that heathen design, would select a statue or other representation of the Angel Raphael as a fitting adornment of their homes.

The Angel Raphael is also the angel of thanksgiving. He insisted with Tobias and his son upon the duty of praising and blessing God for His great mercies, and of publishing His wonderful works. He would not accept as due to himself even the recompense of thanks, and bade them refer all to God, of whom he was only the agent. That spirit of loving thankfulness is one of the particular graces which he obtains for his devoted clients, nor is it of slight advantage to us, as through it we are sure to grow in the love of God and in intimate union with Him.

The Seven Before the Throne

The Angel Raphael, in revealing himself to Tobias and his son, said, "I am the Angel Raphael, one of the seven who stand before the throne." And the Angel Gabriel, when he addressed Zachary, the father of Saint John the Baptist, said, "I am Gabriel, who stand before the Lord," implying, it would seem, that he too, is one of the same privileged group. For it would appear to be fairly certain that there is not question here of the whole multitude of the angels, and that the number *seven* is not in this case a mere symbol of universality.



Mention of the seven occurs also in several passages of the Apocalypse. We read,

Grace be unto you and peace from him that is, and that was, and that is to come, and from the *seven spirits* which are before his throne.... (Apocalypse 1:4)

And again,

there were seven lamps burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God. (Apocalypse 4:5)

And behold in the midst of the throne...a Lamb standing as it were slain, having seven horns and seven eyes,

which are the seven spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth. (Apocalypse 5:6)

And finally, the apostle says,

And I saw seven angels standing in the presence of God. (Apocalypse 8:2)

In the verse, however, which immediately follows this last passage, it is added that "another angel came and stood before the altar, having a golden censer." So that clearly the seven spirits standing before the throne do not comprise all the holy angels, but constitute a group of specially privileged and glorious princes, singled out for highly honourable and important ministry.

There is even mention of another band of seven angels having the seven last plagues. (Apocalypse 15:1) But they are not spoken of as standing before the throne or in the presence of God, and the question arises as to the rank or dignity of the group who are previously mentioned, and to whom there is such frequent reference in Holy Writ.

The words, "the seven who stand before the throne," are so explicit that the obvious inference would seem to be, that those to whom they refer not only belong to the highest of the angelic choirs, that is, to those who in a particular manner stand in waiting before the majesty of God, but that even among these they hold an especially prominent and exalted place. The solemnity of the context where mention of them is first made by Saint John, and the intimate association with our Divine Lord, whose mighty and ever watchful ministers they are (for that would appear to be the meaning underlying the symbolism of the horns and eyes) would suggest that these seven illustrious spirits are glorious among the angels themselves, and foremost princes

of the heavenly court.

There occurs the difficulty that they are described as "sent into the whole world," and that the Angel Raphael in particular, who is one of them, was even sent of a prolonged mission of a merely private nature.

To this difficulty, taking the latter point first, we might reply with Suarez that there seems to be no convincing reason why one even of the highest angels might not be sent to earth, not as an ordinary thing, but by way of exception, and as a mark of special regard for some saintly personage, even as our Lord himself, and His Blessed Mother have at times descended to earth to console or to honour some favoured servant of God. Cornelius a Lapide too, observes that we read in the lives of some great saints, that they had a seraph deputed by God to act as their guardian angel.

But the words, "sent forth into all the earth," which are spoken of the seven spirits universally (Apocalypse 5:6) present, perhaps, a more serious difficulty. For they express, as it would seem, no mere exceptional function of the seven, but one which falls to them as their habitual and especial lot. The difficulty, however, might be effectually met, as it is met by some writers, by a simple denial of the distinction between angels who minister, and angels who assist before the throne; and an argument might be drawn in support of this denial from the fact that the Angel Raphael says pointedly of himself, that he is one of the seven who stand before the throne, and further, that the seven who are described as "sent forth into all the earth," are also said to stand in the presence of God.

Some theologians suggest that these mighty spirits may be the seven highest angels in each of the seven choirs. This Suarez rejects on the ground that one must then be

assigned to the choir of thrones and another to that of the dominations, none of which, however, are sent. Yet the suggestion of Suarez himself is scarcely happier. He supposes that they may all belong to the lowest choir, and yet have no definite ministry assigned to them, being ever at the beck of the Most High for the execution of any task proportioned to their rank. He adds that we may even suppose that there are seven such in each of the choirs of ministering angels.

This supposition, however, fails to throw any light on the identity of the seven referred to by the Angel Raphael, and by Saint John in the Apocalypse. They surely are a definite group of angels, and apparently of exalted rank; and it affords us no clue to who they are or what they are, to suggest that there may be other groups of like number belonging to various choirs. In a matter, then, which is so obscure, it may be allowed to each to hold what appears to him the more likely or the more attractive view.

Special veneration has long been shown to these blessed spirits in various cities of Italy, and at Palermo in Sicily there was, as far back as the sixteenth century, a church dedicated to the seven with representations of them which were already ancient. It was the pious rector of this church who went to Rome in 1527 to promote devotion to them at the centre of Catholic verity, and it was mainly through the exertions that the site of the Baths of Diocletian was secured for the erection of a temple in their honour. Pope Pius IV gave to the celebrated Michael Angelo the task of drawing up the plans, and when the work was completed, he solemnly dedicated it, in the presence of the College of Cardinals and a great multitude, to Saint Mary of the Angels; that is to say, not directly, but indirectly to "the seven spirits who stand before the throne."

From these seven spirits, Saint John wishes grace and peace to all the faithful, not as though they were the authors of grace and peace, but as ministers of God, charged with our welfare, and most ready to employ in our behalf the favour they enjoy with the King of kings, of whose court they are such glorious ornaments. It is for us, then, to deserve their special protection by the fervour and frequency with which we invoke them and by the loving confidence with which we have recourse to them, knowing them to be the heavenly appointed patrons and protectors of all Christendom, and our intercessors with God, whom He has set over us to guard and aid us in our life-long struggle for the kingdom of heaven.

The Queen of Angels

A treatise on the holy angels, however, brief, would be incomplete without a few words in praise of her who is the glorious "Queen of Angels." This, as every one knows, is one of the titles of the "Litany of Loreto," which has the official sanction of the Church, being incorporated in the liturgy. It has also, we may say, the endorsement of the angels themselves. For is it not to them that we owe the beautiful Easter anthem in honour of Our Lady? And are not the first words, "Queen of Heaven," an equivalent of "Queen of Angels," or more than an equivalent, having even a wider meaning?



Certainly, in the Kingdom of Heaven, the gauge by which all things are measured is heavenly grace, and in this, as Suarez declares, the Blessed Virgin surpasses not only the greatest saints, but even the highest angels. In fact, that illustrious doctor says that it is of faith that Our Lady is superior to them all in blessedness. It follows, then, that she surpasses all in grace, as beatitude is proportioned to grace.

Hence, Saint John Damascene calls her an "abyss of grace." And Saint Epiphanius, addressing her, says, "Excepting God alone, thou art superior to all others, not can the tongues of men or angels worthily praise thee." And Saint Bernardine avers that her perfection is so great that only God can fully understand it. And, finally, Saint Ephrem proclaims her "holier than the cherubim, holier than the seraphim, and

incomparably more glorious than all the rest of the heavenly hosts."

And indeed the grace which Mary received in her first sanctification surpassed the final grace of the highest of the angels, as was only befitting in the case of her who was one day to be raised to the supreme dignity of Mother of God, and whom her Divine Son already loved as destined to that closest union with Him. He loved her beyond angels and saints, and hence adorned her soul with greater grace than that of all other creatures.

"Observe the seraphim," exclaims Saint Peter Damian, "and you will see, that all that is greatest is less than the Virgin, and that only the Artificer surpasses this work."

It is in this sense that Catholic divines understand such texts of Scripture as the passage at the opening of the 86th Psalm, "Her foundations are in the holy mountains." That is to say, the grace which was for others the term beyond which they did not pass, was only a beginning for Mary, and was enhanced and intensified by numberless acts of the most perfect charity, until at the close of her long earthly career her grace and her merit were indeed a boundless abyss, a treasure which to created intelligence was truly inconceivable. No wonder that Suarez, who makes some sort of computation of the final sum of Mary's sanctity, holds that it is far greater than the combined sanctity of all the angels and saints.

Hence Saint Ildephonsus, as quoted by Suarez, says, "As what she did was incomparable, and what she received was ineffable, so the glory which she merited as a recompense, is incomprehensible." And Saint Damascene says that "there is an infinite distance between the Mother of God and the servants of God."

Hence, also, Saint John Chrysostom affirms that there is nothing in the whole world that can bear comparison with Mary, whom he pronounces "incomparably more glorious than the seraphim." And Saint Lawrence Justinian says that "deservedly whatever honour, whatever blessedness, was found in others individually, was abundantly present in the Blessed Virgin." And Saint Jerome declares that "to others grace was imparted by portions, but upon Mary the whole fullness of grace was poured out simultaneously. And Saint Peter Damian says that

standing forth amid the souls of the saints and the choirs of angels, and lifted up above them, she excels them in merit individually and outstrips the titles of all.

And he concludes with these words,

All radiant amid that inaccessible light, she so unites in her the dignity of both orders of spirits, that they are as though they were not, and in comparison with her they cannot and ought not to appear.

Mary, then, is indeed the "Queen of Angels." her grace and supernatural blessedness lift her far above the most excellent of the elect, to an amazing height of glory at the right hand of her Divine Son. And the sweetness of her manner which endears her to the everlasting kingdom of love. The angels bow low before her, as the Angel Gabriel did at Nazareth. It is a privilege for them to minister to her, whom with that bright spirit they recognize as full of grace, and they are thrilled with delight as forever they proclaim her "blessed among women," a veritable prodigy of the divine wisdom and omnipotence, the "unapproachable crown of all the saints."

Epilogue

The angels are, in a true sense, the crown of the universe. The mere lifeless elements and the lower orders of living organisms show forth but very imperfectly the attributes of their Maker. In man, to be sure, made as he is in the image and likeness of God, the glory of the all-wise Creator shines out with far



greater lustre. But God is a spirit, and man's soul, thought spiritual, belongs to an inferior category of spiritual substances. The angels, on the other hands, are pure spirits, thus more closely resembling God himself, and in them His beauty and His majesty are most perfectly reflected.

It is one of the blessings of our holy faith that through it we have been brought to know the angels, to realize their presence, and to enter into communion with them. Saint Paul says,

But you are come to mount Sion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the company of many thousands of angels. (Hebrews 12:22)

Although these glorious beings are present everywhere about us, they might as well, for aught the world at large concerns itself with them, be far away in the most distant spheres. But we have come "to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," which is the Church of Christ, the city that is built upon a mountain. We have drawn nigh "to the

company of many thousands of angels," and it is our faith that has brought us nigh. For without faith we could not have known them, but like the heather, thought on all sides surrounded and assisted by them, we should still have been far from them, as they would have been far from us - far from our thoughts and far from our affections.

Surely we ought to be grateful for the gift of faith - for it is a gift, as the apostle reminds us - and by evincing a due appreciation of our good fortune in having been brought within the pale of Holy Church and admitted to a knowledge of the wondrous secrets which her divine Spouse has confided to her, dispose ourselves for the fullest realization and the most perfect fruition of those truths, when at last the veil is drawn from our eyes and boundless light burst upon them in the home of our heavenly Father.

There we shall see how blessed is that "company of many thousands of angels," and how happy it is for us that having loved and honoured them here on earth, we are thenceforward to be most closely associated with them in the joys of the kingdom of heaven.

About This Book

This e-book is based on **The Holy Angels** by Father Raphael V O'Connell, SJ, published in 1923 by P J Kennedy and Sons in New York. It was dedicated by the author to Mary, Queen of Angels.

Imprimi Potest:

Josephus H Rockwell, SJ, Praepositus Prov. Marylandiae
Neo-Eboracensis

Nihil Obstat:

Arthurus J Scanlan, STD, Censor Librorum

Imprimatur:

+Patritius J Hayes, DD, Archiepiscopus Neo-Eboracensis,
die 10 Maii 1923

* The cover image is a detail from *Last Judgment* by Fra Angelico, c.1431, tempera on panel, Museo di San Marco, Florence, Italy.

* The image of Michael the Archangel slaying the dragon is a detail of a stained glass window in the church Saint Trophime, Alsace, Bas-Rhin Eschau, France; date and artist unknown; photographed in 2012 by Ralph Hammann, and swiped off Wikimedia Commons.

* The image of Gabriel the Archangel is from the painting *Annonciation* by William-Adolphe Bouguereau, 1888; swiped from Wikimedia Commons.

* The image of Raphael the Archangel is from the painting *San Rafael Arcangel* by Bartolomé Román, c.1628, Art

Gallery of the Church of San Pedro de Lima; swiped from Wikimedia Commons.

For more free ebooks and other material related to the saints and angels of the Church, visit us at

CatholicSaints.Info
CatholicSaints.Mobi
email CatholicSaints.*

